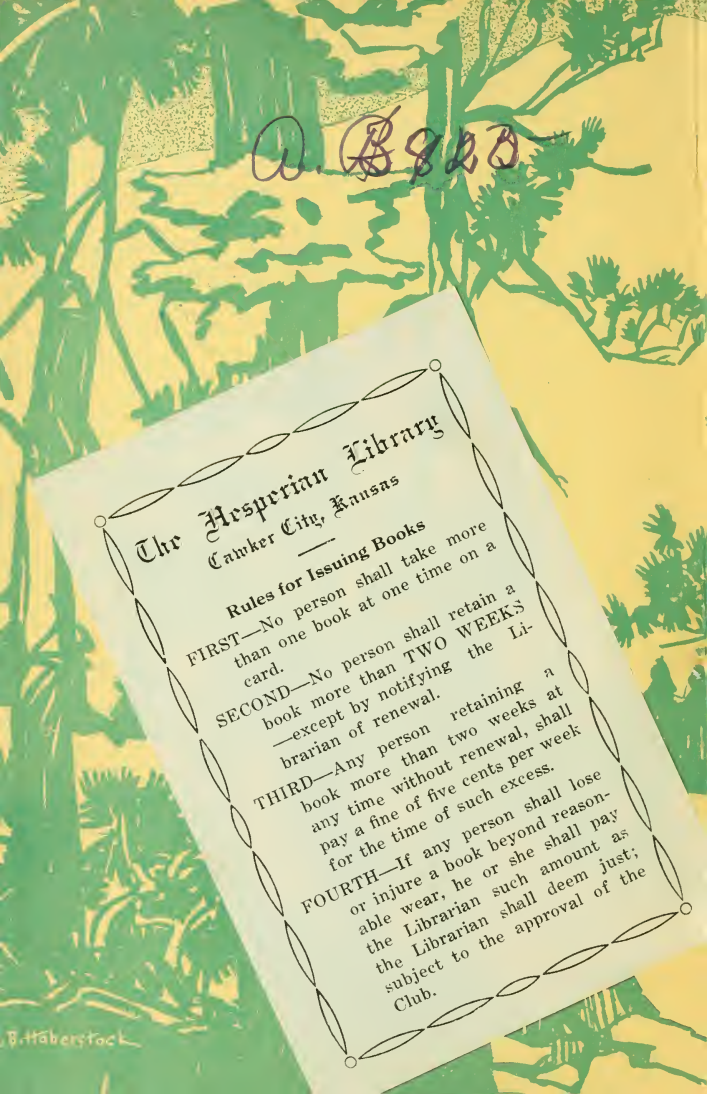
JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD

SON OF THE FORESTS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SON OF THE FORESTS

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SON OF THE FORESTS

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY BY
JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD

AS COMPLETED BY
DOROTHEA A. BRYANT

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FIRST EDITION

A VAGABOND AT THE GATES

What is this strife and worry all about,
This building up and tearing down of things?
I know a wood where birds flit in and out,
And the west wind sings.

What of the sobs and hate-words that I hear,
This shouting and mad barter in the street?
I know a calm hill where the stars seem near
And the airs are sweet.

What of the power that passes in a breath,
This digging for the buried gates of Doom?
I know a vale where echoes laugh at Death,
And the wild flowers bloom.

—GLENN WARD DRESBACH.

The above verses were clipped by Mr. Curwood from a book found in his library and these verses had been mounted on a cardboard, framed, and placed in his desk in the tower room of Curwood Castle, his studio, where the Shiawassee swings in a great bend through Owosso.—Dorothea A Bryant.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

THOUGH *completed after Mr. Curwood's death, his life-story (as here presented) is fairly called an autobiography because it is largely his own work. At the time of his death the manuscript and notes clearly indicated his intention. I have struck out very little written by him and have added only enough from his notes to make the tale run smoothly. Mr. Curwood began this five years ago. We can only guess why he did not finish it.*

DOROTHEA A. BRYANT

Long Beach, New York.

FOREWORD

Over his keys, the musing organist,
Beginning doubtfully and far away,
First lets his fingers wander as they list
And builds a bridge from dreamland for his lay.

—JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

WE—my friend of many years and I—were at my cabin in the north woods of Michigan, where for ten weeks—from sixteen degrees below zero until the coming of glorious spring—I had shut myself away from the outside world to work on a novel, and to live, while writing my story, in closest touch with that Nature, which I love so deeply and which to me is as beautiful and as significant when clothed in ice and snow as when invested with the softer and more luxurious raiment of wild-flower time.

Through the open windows and door of my cabin of logs the cool night air brought with it a perfume of pine and balsam and fragrant cedar, breathed like an incense from an unbroken wilderness of valley and swamp and hill, and mingling in my humble abode with the sweetness of trailing arbutus which we had gathered in masses that day.

The night was filled with stars so bright and clear that heaven seemed to have drawn nearer to us; and in their friendly light, an hour before, we had seen a mother deer and her fawn across my little clearing.

So bright were these thousands of other worlds, and so bright had they been for many nights, that they made me think of friendly homes filled with light and happiness and with no curtains at their windows to shut in their inspiring cheer.

All about us was the green and black wilderness; a wilderness that breathed and whispered and softly told tales to itself on this night; a wilderness that beckoned and waved to us gently;

that sang a lullaby to the cabin as if the slaughtered timbers in it still had their living friends to comfort and to grieve; a wilderness vibrant with its life and mystery, a Greater Book written by God Himself, a little sign given to man that he might, in time, come to understand the sacrilege and blasphemy of worshipping man-made words and the little tin idols of man-made sects and creeds.

Against the stars in the sky this forest had built itself in spires and towers and battlemented tabernacles as far as the eyes could see; and over my cabin it bent and whispered, while all about was a vast silence so that the man who was with me, my friend, fancied and guessed what I already knew—that in its voice were not only inspiration and hope, but also a yearning to be understood. To me it was a whisper from the Great Master protesting gently against the madness and barbarism of fanatical creeds and religions that have sown discord and dissension throughout the earth since the beginning of human

thought, a plea even more gentle for man to take out of his eyes the blinding egoism that had, and forever will until he frees himself from this bonddage, bar him from the sublimity and the glory of the one and true understanding of life and of death, and of that indestructible mystery in him which, for lack of a better name, he calls his soul.

I voiced these thoughts to my friend, and after a while he laid a hand on my arm. "Write your story," he said. "You are a part of this. You were born with its blood in your veins. You understand its language. Your heart is a part of its heart. You have told me often that if God has no place for the creatures of Nature then you, too, are lost. You believe that even the trees and flowers have souls, that same indestructible something which is a part of yourself. Write the story for us all. Many thousands will welcome what you have to say, Jim," he went on. "You have more boy friends in this world than any other living man. In your novels of romance, your tales of adventure and your stories about animals you have

shown them—and men and women also—the clean soul of Nature. The boys, with their fathers and mothers, ought to know your own adventures, how you built yourself, and the obstacles you have overcome, what were your ambitions and your inspirations, how you have molded your life."

"It will be only the story of an average man," I objected, "but I'll do it."

We sat in silence again on that ridge-top while the moon sailed higher and higher overhead, friends who needed no spoken word to appreciate the glory of just being alive in this splendid old world. The night itself was growing a little tired when we returned to the cabin.

J. O. C.

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SON OF THE FORESTS

CHAPTER I

RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

With aching hands and bleeding feet,
We dig and heap, lay stone on stone;
We bear the burden and the heat
Of the long day and wish 'twere done.
Not till the hours of light return
All we have built do we discern.

—MATTHEW ARNOLD

HEREDITY has little effect in the shaping of one's destiny. My own observation has indicated that environment is, first and last, of the utmost importance. In the records of my ancestors can be found the life stories of many ordinary people, folks who lived ordinary lives, reared ordinary families, and did the things which ordinary people have done since records have been kept at all. There are, however, two events in those chroni-

cles which should be recorded here because of the effect they had on my life.

While the surrender of Lord Cornwallis was still fresh in the recollection of all, an adventurous citizen of Dutch descent, familiar for years with the many dangers of the trails leading into the country of the Mohawks and Oneidas, fell madly in love with a beautiful maiden of a Mohawk village near the headwaters of the Canada River. She was slender and tall. On dainty feet she stepped forth into the forest with the regal carriage of a princess of the blood. My mother, as a very small child, remembered seeing this Indian beauty—then well beyond her eightieth year—and she often remarked that her hair, even at that advanced age, was glossy and black as a crow's wing. She wore shoes so small that my mother, then only ten years old, could not put them on. In her youth this Mohawk maiden must have been of bewitching beauty, else my phlegmatic great-grandfather would hardly have troubled himself to marry her. Men who fre-

quented the forest then in quest of fur, as he did, saw too many Indian women to join lightly in a life journey with one; but it is said the twain remained true lovers as long as they lived. Her blood flowing in my veins has continuously urged me to isolate myself in the wilderness and has left its imprint indelibly upon my life.

About the time my big blond ancestor, who loved the forests as much as the Indians themselves, was ardently wooing his wilderness princess, there was born in Merrie England one who became a naval officer and a famous teller of thrilling accounts of adventure on land and sea, Captain Frederick Marryat. He was my great-uncle. His stories, told by himself to a lad named James, were so marvelous and inspiring that they caused the boy to run away to sea, come to America, and fight throughout the Civil War. Afterward that boy became my father—the finest, bravest, and most honorable dad that ever lived anywhere. Say, if you please, it is merely a coincidence that from my earliest days I was pos-

sessed of an overwhelming desire to express myself in stories of brave men and beautiful women who dared much, loved greatly, and died bravely. I think otherwise, though the famous story teller was not a direct ancestor of mine. Who shall say me nay, with authority?

I have always thought of Owosso, a beautiful little city of some fifteen thousand, in central Michigan, as my home. I was born there in June of the year 1879, so the public records show. My earliest recollections are of playing about that part of it known as West Town with my chum, Charley Miller, whose father ran the combined hotel and saloon not far from where my dad had an old-fashioned shoe store. Hickory trees then grew in the middle of the streets, while barnyard animals and domestic fowls wandered where they chose. Across from Father's shop was a great common filled with pine trees, and the river had dozens of shady nooks where fish abounded, as well as many wonderful swimming holes.

Little happened to me in those days that is

worthy of being set down at this time, or, if events occurred which did have an effect of making me what I am to-day, they have passed from my mind, leaving only the general impression that I was a very ordinary country-town boy, always into mischief, a constant tribulation to my father, who was a gallant gentleman of the old school, exquisite in his courtesy, and often a source of genuine concern to my sainted mother, the sweetest and most quietly refined of gentlewomen.

God must have an understanding heart for the Huck Finns and Tom Sawyers. He must love them in spite of their dirty faces, torn clothes, and escapades of juvenile rascality. Most of them turn out in the end to be respectable citizens who cherish sincerely the parents they drove almost to madness. Love for father and mother is not present with maturity unless there is in the heart of the child a genuine affection and a deep-seated respect and admiration for them, which only God can have created. I loved my parents, as most of my companions loved theirs, and any boy who

loves his father and mother as I did mine must be good, no matter how deeply the shame of dirt may rest upon him or how thoughtless he may be of their admonitions.

My ambitions were only a step behind my imagination, and both were rather above the average of any ordinary trouble maker of my sex, aged six. I had two ambitions which still remain in my memory. One was to achieve the pinnacle of opulence where I could buy a whole bunch of bananas; the other to ride astride the beautiful bustle worn on Sundays and holidays by Kate Russell, who cooked at the hotel which was run by Charley Miller's father. My mother wore a bustle, of course, as did other ladies of the day; but none had one like Kate's. No romping, leaping mustang of the plains ever held a greater lure for a young adventurer. Neither ambition was ever realized, and even my chum, Charley, to whom I told them, was unable to understand why I so mightily desired to accomplish these things.

Father and Mother would have been unutterably shocked had they known the thoughts in the head of their irrepressible barefoot youngster. Neither my face, my hands, nor my clothes were ever clean for long, and my crownless hat poorly restrained my sun-bleached hair, always disordered, while I played in those days of yore—1885, to be exact—on the banks of the Shiawassee. When we achieve parenthood most of us lose our sympathy and understanding for the things which were characteristic of our youth. We boil and scrub our progeny in a profitless endeavor to keep them clean and presentable on all occasions, and threaten them with dire punishment, or at least vigorously admonish them, because of what we ourselves did at their ages. But just as sure as death, the father who finds himself possessed of a bathtub angel, courteous and polite in all emergencies, whose clothes are always clean and in order and whose conduct is above reproach, has deep down in him a feeling of hopelessness and disappointment. Parents are nice

people and it is quite impossible to get along without them; but they are mighty queer.

Had I continued to live in West Town at Owosso, I might have become a genius, but Fate determined a change was advisable when I was six years old.

My father failed in business. Being honest, he paid his debts, and with the little he saved from the wreck made the first payment on what he thought was a farm. In the dead of winter he and my brother Ed, then sixteen years of age, went down into Ohio, where Dad had done his courting, and chose a forty-acre place. When the snow which covered it had melted he found he had acquired a stone quarry, and for seven years thereafter I picked up stones. So did my father and my brother. As fast as we could pick up one crop of them the plow would turn out another. We built stone fences and had piles as big as our house all over the place. The county bought two thousand wagonloads at ten cents a load for a

swampy stretch of road; and still there were stones everywhere.

But how I love that farm! Not for any other period of my life would I exchange the seven years during which it was my home. They were not only happy years, but years of tremendous significance for me. In those glorious days I was unmindful of poverty and its vicissitudes and I began to come into possession of the most precious of my heritages, my love of Nature. Along with this love came an ever-increasing desire for adventure. Nights came to hold a peculiar fascination for me. I grew to love the moon and the stars. I was thrilled by the whispering sounds in the near-by woods, when all the world had gone to sleep. Deep shadows, twisting shapes, pools and lakes of moonlight made up a veritable fairy-land for me.

Those years on that stony farm were filled with the simplicities and unadorned living of the pioneer. They constitute a part of my life which I now consider my Fortunate Age.

There were no automobiles, no moving pictures, no radios, nor any one of a hundred other contrivances which we now deem necessary for youth. Our roads were winding, white trails of soft, hot dust in summer and of deep snow in the winter. In our community a pair of new boots was an event of neighborhood interest, and a girl who came to school in a new calico dress was the envy and admiration of all. Dinner bells and conch horns still made glad music over the countryside, and happiness meant merely to eat regularly and keep warm.

Memorial Day—"Decoration Day"—next to Christmas and Thanksgiving, brought with it the most exciting events of all the year. From miles about we would assemble in the little village of Berlin Heights and follow with awesome thrills the men of the Grand Army of the Republic as they marched, with real muskets over their shoulders, until our greatest moment was achieved when these mighty muskets roared their salute over the graves of the heroic dead.

Small things stirred us and trivial happenings interested and thrilled. It was a most exciting event when there passed along our country road the first bicycle many of us had ever seen. I recall very clearly that our teacher excused us from the schoolroom, the better to behold that miracle.

We lived in a square white house which I then thought a palace, but which I later came to understand to be a very small and humble dwelling. But we were happy there—my parents, my brother Ed, my sister Cora, and myself—although we did drink Lion Coffee at two pounds for a quarter and could afford all the eggs we wanted only at Easter. Somehow, Mother always managed to have something to eat, and cheerfulness abounded in our humble home. No day passed in which, at some time, my lovely mother could not be found sitting on my father's lap. No home could be unhappy with such a father and mother. Our neighbors loved us and considered us to be gentlefolk, though my dad did all their cobbling.

Clear, indeed, in my memory are the spruce trees around the home, and I can hear yet the whistling of the wind through them on blustery, cold nights. How I loved winter with its deep snows, the brilliant stars of its exhilarating nights, and the moonlight streaming into my room when the very bones of the house cracked with the cold and my breath made wondrous designs on the windowpanes.

Returning from an early visit to my traps on a winter morning, a blue spiral of wood smoke could be seen rising from the kitchen chimney, and I would find my mother busy over the pancake griddle. How glorious were those pancakes of my youth! To be eaten with bacon and gravy, or the syrup made in early spring from the sap of the maples in our own woods. On the armorial bearings of our family escutcheon a pancake rampant should be most conspicuous, for it was symbolic of our happy poverty.

However, the outstanding picture which hangs on that part of Memory's wall is one of stones,

hard and hot to the point of blistering in the summertime: stones which must be built into fences or heaped into piles for other purposes: stones which always impeded proper cultivation of the land: stones which gave me many an aching muscle, for it became peculiarly my duty to gather them.

The stones set me thinking and taught me the need of doing thoroughly what had become an ever-present duty. A grim necessity became a blessing. To build up piles of stone was an achievement, a creative process, a thing that began to build character in me along with those piles of stone which grew as I labored. I experienced a greater thrill when I had done three piles than when I had accomplished but two. The thrill developed into pride—a childish pride over having built something really worth while in this world.

I was destined to write steadily for ten years before I sold my first story—for five dollars, by the way—and it was my fate to write for twenty-

one years before I could make a comfortable living at it. Such success as I have achieved has been pounded out with naked fists through many years of hard work. Were it not for the stones, the stones, the inexhaustible stones which I gathered on that Ohio farm, I think I should have admitted failure long ago.

In the ninth year of my life came an event of importance. I "got religion," as the experience was then called—so hard that I became a seven-day wonder in our rural community. Revival meetings were being held at Joppa, a mile distant from our farm. At a night meeting, when the excitement of the audience had reached a high pitch, I gave the most amazing exhibition of the fact that the "Holy Ghost" had entered into me. Leaping suddenly to the platform of the little country church, I loudly proclaimed my salvation. If ever a boy was inspired, I was. No ancient prophet saw his marvelous visions, now preserved to us in Holy Writ, more clearly than I saw mine, I believe.

Until then, in matters of creed I had been like nearly all the boys and girls about me, utterly intolerant of those who thought otherwise than I, confident that they were kin of Satan himself; but I was not given to militant measures calculated to enforce my views upon them. That a Baptist and a Methodist could not both go to heaven was clear, and that one or the other was sure to reach the only other place where anyone could go was accepted as beyond argument. I would as soon have denied the omnipotence of God or the divinity of Christ. That anyone should doubt either was unheard of then, where I lived. My views on other matters were equally positive, but with respect to them I was always prone to fight. So were my associates. The son of a Republican father always attacked the scion of a Democrat on sight, unless there was an obvious danger that the attacked one would speedily prevail. Then, in matters political as always in matters of "religion," discretion became the better part of valor.

That first night of my salvation I went home cross-lots, unwilling to share the highway with anyone. I was unafraid of the dark fields and ghostly woods for an angel went with me. She was tall and of great beauty. Her wings and flowing robes were white as snow and her beautiful long hair streamed in golden splendor about her. She was there to guide and protect me. Of what should I be afraid? My exaltation was complete.

I have never attempted to explain, or even quite understand, how such a vision could come to a boy of my age, and shall not undertake it now. I merely record here that a youth who had heretofore known only the intolerance and bigotry characteristic of the hinterland forty years ago, and who had experienced nothing of beauty or pleasure in religion, did have that vision. I had feared God and had no conception of loving Him. A great, austere Being, somewhere up above the clouds, daily keeping a careful account of each human deed in a great book. That He had opened a way, through the death of Christ, for

my salvation I knew, of course, but I considered Him utterly merciless otherwise. Nevertheless, He did appoint an angel for my particular care that night.

From the church as I knew it came vivid mental pictures of a seething, roaring furnace wherein devils with forked tails broiled their victims —all who didn't believe as I did—and equally vivid pictures of Heaven, a city of golden streets, peopled with white-winged angels forever playing upon harps. This was attainable only in the precise manner declared by the particular church whose representative was speaking. There was no place midway between these extremes. All people were either saved or damned.

With such a background, it is not strange that I took my "conversion" with the utmost seriousness. It didn't occur to me to keep it a secret. That I had found something of inestimable value, something which every other human should share with me, seemed the only possible conclusion. First, I told my parents; and then let it be known

at school. It is impossible for me adequately to describe what followed the last disclosure. I worked with tremendous zeal to get my companions to "go forward," which was then the accepted way of showing that one had been converted. They laughed—and laughter directed toward me, after my experience at Joppa and my walk with my beautiful angel, meant a fight. I had two or three each day. And how I could fight when thus inspired! But the flesh is weak though the spirit be strong, and I couldn't whip everyone into seeing matters in the same way I did. As I began to wear down I received with greater frequency drubbings which were good for my soul, though not administered with any such intent, nor so taken at that time. Slowly but surely I was pummeled back to mental health.

While these experiences were transpiring I lost interest in the stones, though I was not permitted to abandon the task of gathering them. Oh, the indescribable drudgery of those weeks! But with

my return to normalcy I found myself once more building castles in the air as I piled stones on stones, and again I thrilled over the adventures which in my imagination befell the make-believe people who lived in a world that only I had the right to enter. Even my dear father and mother were excluded from that sacred land, though I did try more than once to smuggle them in, attempts which failed because they could not see the wonderful domain behind the gates I timidly left ajar. At the little red brick schoolhouse at Four Corners, later called Ogontz, in Erie County, Ohio, I offered my playmates free passage to my land of dreams, but was so ridiculed by the other boys and girls that I soon withdrew the invitation. Manfully, however, I clung to my dreams, born over the stone piles, sharing them only with my chum, Clarence Hill—"Skinny" we called him for obvious reasons. When I stood at his grave many years later, recalling our boyhood adventuring together in that land where no others might enter, I felt most keenly the pangs of lone-

liness and grief, though the fortunes of life had separated us long before.

Then my married sister, Amy, came to see us from Michigan, which seemed so far away. Instantly she took an interest in my dreams and the childish romances they bred, laboriously written out in our big, old-fashioned kitchen, while the teakettle sang merrily and the wood fire cracked. Her interest was not casual, not a mere indulgence of the whims of a little brother. She was serious, as serious as I myself, and forthwith was given the freedom of all my cities. She still has their golden keys. She became an interested partner. In my story writing of that day she was my counselor, guide, and friend, as she has remained ever since. I have always blessed her that she did not enthuse too much over what I wrote, but explained to me frankly what a long, hard task there was ahead of me before I could hope to put on paper the kind of stories I liked to read. She urged me on, and even sent one of my impossible creations to the editor of *Happy*

Hours. What an inspiration it was when I received a letter from that mighty man complimenting me on my effort and assuring me that if I had the courage and perseverance I was bound to succeed.

My sister also aroused an interest in me on the part of a young man of Owosso, at that time writing for *Golden Days*—Fred Janette, afterward an accomplished newspaper editor. He was then receiving the enormous sum of three hundred dollars for his best juvenile serials. After that I was bound to become an author—a great author—a writer whose stories would interest and thrill others as this great man's stories interested and thrilled me. When my sister went back to distant Michigan, I received an encouraging letter from her once a month.

Over my stone piles I built such castles as the world has never seen. In and about them there lived and fought heroes of greater courage than ever any herald did proclaim. They performed deeds of valor far surpassing the most astonish-

ing tale that ever any troubadour has sung. With blistered hands and aching muscles I had grimly undertaken to lay stone on stone, and I whistled at my task. Significant, indeed, in the life of a child may be a few words, or the lack of them—the showing of a genuine interest or indifference. In those plastic years of my life the cheer and aid extended by my sister were of monumental importance. I was fully embarked on the project of becoming an author. Nothing but death could stop me.

CHAPTER II

I BECOME AN OUTLAW AND RUN AWAY TO SEA

Diseases desperate grown
By desperate appliance are relieved;
Or not at all.

—SHAKESPEARE

JUST across the road from our house, under a big elm tree, stood the home of Hiram Fisher, where he dwelt with his family, consisting of his wife, Mary, and their daughter, Jeanne, the latter a cousin of my chum, Skinny. All about the house where they lived were vineyards of Concord and Delaware grapes, which extended to the very edge of Bingham's Woods.

Jeanne had lovely blue eyes, a thick braid of

radiant, gold-brown hair, and a pink-and-white skin that was flawless save for a few freckles which appeared as she grew older. A score of times I have heard my mother say that she was the prettiest girl in all our countryside, which included several "four corners" and little villages. Everybody loved her, but no one so devoutly as I.

In all my little world there was no one who could compare with Jeanne. She was eleven years old when we arrived at the farm that bleak December day, but with a vision worthy of one much more mature she saw a lad of six, friendless in a strange land, on the verge of tears from lonesomeness and fear of the unknown, and promptly dragged me from an unsettled and cheerless house over to her mother's warm kitchen, where she filled me to suffocation with bread and milk.

Jeanne was my star of hope in all my dark hours, and the ideal of my thoughts and dreams. Mother often achieved her ends through Jeanne

when she sought to accomplish something to which I was strongly opposed. My long legs frequently took me flying to the haven of her protection when Father had decided punishment was necessary. Often she refused to give me up until Dad declared peace. In many a battle at school Jeanne was my salvation; and it was always she who comforted me when I was "done up" by some other boy.

I well remember how she took me from my mother's arms and rocked me through the long hours of a terrible night soon after we reached the farm. I was suffering from a toothache which I thought would surely kill me. Lads of six often do suffer so much more than their elders ever understand. It was Jeanne who gave me the courage to have that tooth pulled the next day by Dr. Benscoter.

Wherever Jeanne went, sunshine and cheer went with her. She whistled and sang about the farm and house, and though a very tomboy at times, who could run, climb trees, and shoot a gun

as well as the best of us, she was always thoughtful of others, and her sympathetic interest in me remained as she grew older and more beautiful.

It is with shame that I find it necessary, in order that my story be true, to record here that for a time when I was eleven the good influence Jeanne had theretofore exerted in my life waned. Not because she failed me, though, but because at that age I came under the domination of the school bully, and his influence made me enter upon a course of wrongdoing destined to change the entire course of my earthly existence.

One day while the English class was reciting I was more than usually restless and Mrs. Bacon, our teacher, told me that unless I corrected myself she would box my ears. The bully was sitting directly behind me. Instantly he whispered: "You're a coward. You don't dast tell her." Before I knew it, I had blurted out the fateful words: "You don't dare!"

From time immemorial the little red school-

house in the country has had a heterogeneous population. For three or four years our school was undeniably rough, largely because of an element of unmanageable youngsters who came to it from the direction of Ceylon. We had about forty pupils ranging from kindergarten age to sixteen or seventeen years. Most of them were nice little girls and boys, but some were not so respectable, and among the latter was Jimmy Curwood. It does not seem strange to me now that the influence of the bully came to control my actions at that time. Neither Jeanne nor I understood then, however. He was so big and so strong! I admired his prowess, and there was no one to point out to me that everyone he bullied or licked was much smaller than himself.

My ability to understand relative values in the conduct of others was very limited. Jeanne was merely inherently good and kind. It was not the result of conscious effort on her part, any more than my own misdeeds were the result of intentional evil on my part. She did not warn me, for

she little understood where the evil influence of the bully was sending me.

To fight a girl was not considered unusual or unchivalrous in our school. No one had ever suggested that to me. Half a dozen girls in our school were first-rate fighters and one of them had licked me on occasion ever since I was seven. Three other sisters often set upon me. One of them I could have handled easily, possibly two of them, but the three combined always punished me.

Very naturally, then, I saw only the question of who might be expected to prevail when Mrs. Bacon accepted my challenge, and I prepared to do my best to vanquish her. The bully prodded me on from behind. "Don't be afeared! Put up your mitts! You can lick 'er! Go on!" So he counseled me; and that day Jeanne had not come to school. Whether her inherent goodness would have shown her that I was doing wrong and have caused her to intervene, I can never know. No

one else moved. I had the center of the stage. My destiny was in my own hands.

That day I did a terrible thing. To Mrs. Bacon, a sweet and gentle lady of about fifty who had never done anything worse to me than administer some well-deserved chastisement, I gave a most thorough walloping. Deliberately I had dared her to fight. It was not mere resentment of punishment previously awarded to me, nor did I merely "unsettle" her accidentally in an effort to save myself from injury. There was no circumstance which could be regarded as in any sense a vindication of my action. Right there on the open floor as an arena was staged one of the most thrilling fights the juvenile eyes of our neighborhood had even seen. I nearly lost the decision, for my opponent was solid and heavy. Resort to stomach punches alone saved me, and every time I delivered one the whole school could hear the teacher grunt. At last she sat down on the floor and began to cry.

Strangely enough, it seemed to me then, only

the bully congratulated me. The others were astonished and afraid, although I do not believe they realized the enormity of what I had done. My own elation did not last long, however. News of it reached Father even before the school board called upon him. After my interview with him I saw the affair in a very different light. There was considerable action before he undertook even to admonish me, and his admonitions were couched in language as vigorous as his action which had preceded them. He even told me, as others did, that people were sent to jail for less than I had done. Eventually I told Mrs. Bacon that I was sorry and received her forgiveness.

But the influence of the bully, who was really a bad youngster as well as a tough one, was not broken. He took me under his wing and proved his friendship a few days later by soundly thrashing an overgrown German boy who was threatening me. This led to an association which soon brought about the second of the escapades which so altered the course of my life. I became an out-

law, so it seemed to my childish understanding, after the event had transpired, and I determined to run away to sea.

The influence of the bully and the protection he gave me raised my prestige at school immensely, but I was not satisfied, and I decided to show them all that I possessed qualities of courage and resourcefulness superior even to those of the bully himself. I would crown myself with a glory that would not soon fade away.

Mother had a pistol of small caliber which she had carried when with my father in Texas, years before I was born. I smuggled it from home and brought it to school with me. For a boy to have such a forbidden weapon at all was in itself a mark of distinction, and none dared inform the teacher of what I had guardedly drawn from my pocket and exhibited to their wondering inspection.

That afternoon I secured permission to leave the schoolroom for a few moments, but did so without disclosing truthfully why I desired such

liberty. Arrived outside, I stood in some doubt as to just what such a hero as I fancied myself to be should be expected to do. At that moment Gertie Smith and two other little girls ran from the schoolhouse and disappeared into a small outbuilding not more than twenty paces from where I stood. Instantly my evil genii suggested what should be done. An enormous and thrilling inspiration took hold of me.

Not a thought of injuring the girls entered my mind as I began joyously to bombard them in their retreat. It was but an instance of rascality due to my limited reasoning power. I thought only of the unprecedented sensation I was creating. I, little Jimmy Curwood, was proving to all the world that picturesque courage and daredevil heroism were not dead. But I was soon disillusioned.

School "let out," in the parlance of the time, with such sudden excitement that one might well have thought the place on fire. The girls were hysterical, and my own pal, Skinny, whose friend-

ship had survived even my recent adoration of the bully, went scurrying for Dr. Benscoter, who lived within sight of the schoolhouse. Open-mouthed and as white as my own sun-bleached hair, I was held a prisoner until it was found that the frightened girls were not injured, when my teacher's grip on my collar relaxed for a moment and I sneaked away cross-lots toward home.

A huge black pit yawned before me. I could not see at all into the future, which lately had been so rosy. From my earliest childhood I have had a horror of being hanged, and a sudden fear that such a fate might follow hard upon my wanton rascality added speed to my terror-stricken flight. It seemed that enemies were ahead of me and on all sides. There was no one to point out that in fact I had not injured anyone by my escapade; none to assure me that I had no pursuers. Unreasoning terror had seized upon me and I fled blindly.

Reaching home, Cora told me that Mother was visiting Mrs. Vincent on the other side of

the orchard and that Father and Ed were cultivating corn. So I had no difficulty in securing food, fishing tackle, and a long knife Skinny and I had hammered out of an old file. With no plans at all other than to put as much distance as possible between me and my fancied pursuers, I struck off through Black's Woods in the direction of Lake Erie, which I reached at the mouth of Old Woman's Creek just before dusk.

This was a favorite rendezvous for Skinny and myself. Many good catches of fish had we made where the waters of the creek merged into those of the lake. An abandoned barn stood near by, and several times when we had remained over night we had made ourselves sleeping places of grass and old hay in the big mangers that fitted us like twin beds.

In one of these mangers I spent that first night. I had scarcely gotten into it, however, where I would ordinarily have slept soundly, when the thought occurred to me that my pursuers might readily regard this rendezvous as a likely place

to search for me. But neither my reasoning power nor my previous experiences alone in deserted places pointed out to me that I should continue my flight. I was but eleven years old. So I lay still, the prey of horrors which seemed to creep upon me, and at every sound I was athrill with fear. How terribly black the night seemed! Thousands of bullfrogs croaked horribly in the marshy land near the creek mouth. They even came into the ancient barn to boom at me: "You're a goner! You're a goner! You're a goner!" A screech owl on the sagging roof hooted dreadfully, and in the dead silence that followed I could hear the wings of bats above me. I broke into a cold sweat, but at last sleep mercifully spread its mantle of oblivion over me.

When the first red streak of the dawn had come I slid through a hole in the wall, glanced about as cautiously as an Indian scout, and hurried to the place where Skinny and I had concealed a crude raft. On this I put out to sea, intending to pole the raft along in the shallow

water as far as Ruggles Grove, but, passing over a deep hole theretofore unknown to me, I lost the pole and barely escaped tumbling off the raft.

Now my terror increased—and with good cause—for the air and the current combined to carry me out upon the choppy surface of the lake, and by the time the sun had risen I was a full half mile from shore. No words in any language could have properly expressed my relief when a sloop with snowy sails appeared on the horizon. I began to wave my arms and shout when those on board could not possibly have seen or heard me, but the boat came on and eventually I was saved.

Three young fellows, all dressed in white, who seemed like gods to me, were directing the course of the *Sandusky,* for such was the name which I saw in letters of gold on the rescue craft. They immediately questioned me, but it was some time before my courage returned, and with it my voice, which had failed entirely as I shrieked for aid from my perilous position on the drifting raft. Meanwhile we were getting farther away from

shore, for a wind was rising and it was dangerous for the sloop to remain in the comparatively shallow water.

Very soon they had my whole story, though I had determined to tell no one my name or why I was running away. They laughed at my recital of how I licked the teacher, came under the tutelage of the bully, and subsequently was inspired to bombard the little girls. Eventually I found myself laughing with them—I, Jimmy Curwood, an outlaw with a price upon my head. At last these white-clad gods, more splendid than any young men I had ever seen before, who seemed to have come right out of some book, told me I had nothing to fear, that the people back home would neither hang me nor put me in jail, and that I must be returned to my parents as soon as possible. They assured me I had done nothing worse than many other boys before me, and that everything would be forgotten and forgiven if I went back and behaved myself. They described how overcome by anxiety my parents and friends

would be at my disappearance, and altogether these young gentlemen filled me with such happiness and relief that the whole world became bright and attractive again.

They could have put me ashore at Huron, but after some deliberation they decided to take me on to Sandusky, where they were evidently in some haste to arrive. Immediately upon landing a telegram was sent to Ceylon, the agent there being advised to have it delivered to my father three miles away by horse and buggy. Then these young men took me into a wonderful place to eat, an hour or more before noon, fortunately for me. Afterward one of them who must have been deeply interested in my manifest amazement escorted me about the great city of eighteen thousand people, the largest place I had ever seen.

As long as memories have strength to revive themselves, I shall see, as on that marvelous day, the beautiful street, lined with magnificent trees, along which we strolled until we came to a building which covered as much ground as our rasp-

berry patch at home. It was a school. From it were issuing the princes and princesses who lived in the castles and palaces which we had passed. I am sure the young man must have understood, for he drew me off on the green outside the walk, where we could stand and view the whole procession without being in its way.

The line of demarcation between the country schools and those of the cities has nearly vanished since that memorable occasion. But then, and especially in my own community, conditions were vastly different. With us it was the barefoot age, and many girls as well as boys came to our school without shoes. We were very poorly dressed, though nearly always neatly. Our clothes were worn until they shone like mirrors or quite fell away from us. Many wore apparel made over from our parents' cast-off clothing. Some of us spent half the year in overalls. But here were visions of loveliness, little princesses who could easily have made me believe that heaven had opened its doors and let the angels out. By twos and threes,

or in larger groups, they passed us, laughing and talking, dainty as flowers to my hungry eyes, all so infinitely different from any children I had ever seen that I seemed to be in a fairyland. And to my staring eyes the boys who were among them appeared to be younger brothers to the three young gods who had rescued me from the sea. Here, in flesh and blood, were such people as I had supposed lived only in dreams. In those moments it did not occur to me that I was the one conspicuous and discordant note in the scene. Forgotten was my old straw hat with its broken crown and ragged brim; I was unaware of the shortness of my outgrown pants, my skinny legs and unshod feet. I did not think of my soiled and crumpled waist with a tie, or of my home-cut, disordered hair. I was having visions too idyllic to be true.

When they were gone and I could draw a full breath my friend escorted me up the wide walk into the magnificent structure which had sheltered so much beauty. Its great halls, the huge rooms

with their rows of desks, its vastness and mystery made it a place of enchantment for me. I was amazed that all the men and women I saw there were teachers.

Everything except that school faded away. In this most crucial of all the hours in my brief life there was born the great ambition to become a part of the new and wonderful existence which chance and adventure had brought me to behold. Then and there I should have blessed the lucky stars that made me fight my teacher and bring my mother's pistol to school. But no thought of Mrs. Bacon, nor of the dreaded ogres on the school board, entered my mind in that hour. Even after I was homeward bound, in the conductor's care, making that tremendous journey of twenty-odd miles alone, it was that school which continued to thrill me.

In one great vivid flash my life had changed. I no longer wanted to be a buffalo hunter or Indian fighter, nor even the captain of a treasure ship searching out pirate-buried gold. I wanted to go

to that school, and be a prince among the princesses. I would walk with them under the spreading trees, with a cap, a white starched waist and big tie, and shoes so bright I could see my face in them. The world outside my stony fields and woods had opened its door to me, and all the power of my imagination had seized upon it.

Safely at home that night, I told my father and mother about the wondrous events since I had run away, but chiefly I told them of that marvelous school; and when I came to this, atremble in the fervor of my desire, tears glistened in my mother's eyes.

CHAPTER III

THE GOLDEN GODDESS ACROSS THE WAY

Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.
—THOMAS GRAY

As our buggy rattled through the gateway into our yard on that evening of my return from Sandusky, Jeanne was there with my mother to greet me. But it was not until the next day, in the afternoon which followed my homecoming, when Mother had sent me over for a bag of dried hops, that I opened my heart fully to her and let her see all there was in it. I think she saw even farther than I at that time, and I shall never forget the occasion.

Jeanne was just attaining the age of flowering maidenhood, and she was vastly proud of the splendid beauty of her hair which she was sunning and brushing at the moment. I do not recall that I thought very much about it at that time, but as I look back now I can appreciate what a golden goddess of hope and inspiration she must have been. We sat on the porch together and she put an arm around me, hugging me up to her a little when she told me that Sandusky was such a great distance away. Nearly thirty miles! I could not possibly hope to go there to school. "Jimmy," she said, "to go to a school like that, you've got to have money. And how are you going to get money—out here?"

Not until years later did I understand what the sad and hopeless tones of her voice meant. She had come face to face with the grim necessity of having money, and her realization of the futility of trying ever to acquire enough of it had begun to tumble her castles down. My beautiful Jeanne had been finding solace in dreams even

more than I. In our community money was thrice precious. Even when crops were good, none had more than just enough to keep the mortgage at bay, but the necessary food which could not be raised on the farm, and secure clothes of the most simple kind. There was not a dollar for luxuries, nor a cent to gamble in the achievement of ambition.

To Jeanne the doors of the world were closed and fastened by bars of precedent that were stronger than steel. The city did not want her—would not accept her. Fully a hundred vocations now open to her sex were not available to Jeanne when she reached the portal of what should have been to her a glorious young womanhood. Little wonder she stood with reluctant feet, hesitating to accept what life had in store for her. I did not then realize it, but now I am sure that Jeanne must have sensed the terrible tragedy of it and must have realized that she could only go on dreaming, while I—possibly—might go out into the world and make my dreams come true.

So she fought that I might have the chance she could never enjoy herself. She fired my hopes and helped to keep them burning. There were excellent schools at Berlin Heights, Florence, and Wakeman, she told me, schools that would compare favorably with the larger one I had seen at Sandusky. Wakeman was quite a town, and not so far away but that if I worked hard and saved what money I could get, I might fairly hope to go there. I must keep talking about it to my folks. She planned with me and never lost a chance to plead my cause to my father.

Until then I had never known the value of money and had not minded that I did not have it. I had measured earthly treasure through the medium of so many ounces of powder and shot. I knew, of course, how my mother saved eggs to buy groceries when the weekly peddler came by, that we were careful of our butter, and that Father was always under the strain of laying aside enough to pay our taxes and the interest on the mortgage. But I had not suffered personally,

nor had I felt, myself, any particular discomfort from our poverty. I always had had enough to eat and had been clothed as well as I felt any need for. The tragedy of our straitened circumstances had not begun to press upon me, and I was too young to understand the worries and trials of my parents.

Urged on by Jeanne, and inspired by the recollection of that magnificent school in Sandusky, I became grimly determined that I would go away to study, and soon my mother plotted with us. Relentlessly she and Jeanne worked to wear down my father's certainty that what I sought was quite impossible. It was not that he didn't understand and sympathize with me, but rather that he saw obstacles which to him seemed insuperable. It would take so much money to send me away to school. I would need better clothes, and would have to pay for board and room. If our peach orchard, which the frost attacked so often, would only bear a good crop he would think about it—

but he simply couldn't afford the expense just now.

Anyway, there was no better place for a boy than home, Father argued. We were happy there on the farm. Children were much better off with their parents until they became much older than I. His own experience of running away to sea, and being cast off by his relatives, made him afraid for me. Now I can understand his point of view and I love him the more for it.

Autumn passed and winter came. With great vigor I hunted and trapped rabbits which I sold for ten cents each to a man at Florence who made a business of shipping them to the cities. Half a mile from our place lived Tom Lee, the most prosperous farmer anywhere about our countryside. Toward spring he gave me a job of picking up brush in his woods at twenty-five cents an acre. I had saved almost enough to buy a suit of clothes when summer came again.

Then Jeanne and Mother had the brilliant idea which made it possible for my dream to come

true. We should move to town that winter and Dad should set up a cobbling shop! But how could we leave the farm alone all winter? Who would care for our cow, the two horses, the pigs and chickens? My big brother came to the rescue. Ed, who was destined for the soil, offered to remain and care for the place until spring. How I bless him! In later years he became one of the most expert fruit growers in northern Ohio, where he lived until the citrus groves of Florida called him.

All that summer we planned, and it was decided that in the fall we should go to Wakeman, my mother's girlhood home, where she had lived as a bride during the anxious years my father was away at war. Jeanne and Mother eventually wore down my father's last objection, that if I did go to school in town I would probably do nothing but raise the devil and render our sacrifice in vain. The decision was made irrevocable by a letter from my sister Amy, suggesting that I might live with her in Owosso and go to school

there. Mother cried at the thought of having me so far away from her, and when my mother cried Dad always put on spurs and rode hard. So he arranged for his little cobbling shop and the date was set for our moving into town. I can see Mother's flushed cheeks as he packed and planned. It was a great event in her life as well as in mine.

It was early in the morning when we started for Wakeman, taking one big load of household goods with us. Skinny was there to see me off and each of us manfully struggled to keep back the tears. Jeanne kissed my mother good-bye—I forget whether she kissed me or not—and we started down the quiet, dusty road on my Great Adventure. We passed the last of our apple orchard and Vincent's old-fashioned house. As we came to the edge of Bingham's Woods I could see Skinny in the middle of the road waving his old hat, and beyond him were Jeanne and the Fishers.

Wakeman must have had around a thousand

inhabitants when I went there. It was the trading center for a wide farming community. On the main line of the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern, trains passed frequently both night and day. Its one main street was the center of such activity as I had never known except in the almost forgotten days at Owosso. There were two big general stores in which one could buy anything from an ounce of pepper to a plow; smaller stores that dealt only in groceries, footwear, or clothing; two millinery emporiums, three blacksmith shops, a pool room, and a hotel; and also a big cooperage established half a century before by my grandfather, in which thousands of apple barrels were still being made each year. The change in my environment was complete. Wakeman held an enormous and cosmopolitan interest for me.

On Saturday afternoon and night this country town was transformed into a little city. Farmers would drive in from miles around, fasten their horses to the endless rows of hitching rails, and

after much bartering and trading there would be impromptu gatherings of friends and acquaintances, with much pleasant gossip and the exchange of news and views. The like is rarely if ever seen in these days when every farmer has an automobile; and the land is not better off since the farmer's Saturday has so radically changed.

The life of the residents of the town interested me much more than the weekly visits made by the rural population. I knew the farmers and their ways, but my contact with the townsfolk was a big revelation to me. It broadened immensely my previous conceptions of the world which theretofore had consisted largely of the hinterland of Erie County and a dimly seen "Out West," a hazy land where some day I would go to hunt buffaloes and kill Indians.

In Wakeman I went to the first "party" of my life, where I was really "dressed up," met boys and girls of an entirely different type than I had known before, and played with them in their homes. Some of these new friends of mine

had been as far away as Cleveland, and a few had even gone to Buffalo and Niagara Falls. One had actually been out West, and he told me the most tremendous tales about it.

I recall how Professor Scott's nephew taught me to play on the mouth organ and the Jew's harp, and initiated me into the thrilling swirl of society. I actually got up sufficient courage to buy a three-cent valentine and send it to "my girl," whose living presence for the moment had caused the memory of my beautiful Jeanne to fade a little. My initials were printed clearly on the back of it.

I am normally quick to observe, and soon I noticed that personal appearance counted greatly here in town. I began to take pride in properly attending to matters which had previously received little thought on my part. A problem which had until then been more or less of a worry to my mother was suddenly solved, when a little girl whom I often favorably compared to my princesses in Sandusky suggested very spiritedly

that I go home and wash my neck. I began to see that my mother had been quite right on many matters concerning which I had taken issue with her. During this autumn and winter I became convinced that clean fingernails, a necktie, properly blacked shoes, and a bath more frequently than on Saturday night were important details tending to make me more popular among my associates.

While we were in Wakeman I became acquainted with a lecturer on astronomy who came to talk to the school children and brought with him a long brass telescope which had the appearance of a small cannon. He taught us the first of the most wondrous things I had ever heard about the heavens at night, and even made some progress toward getting us to understand that there was an unknown universe beyond. At first I listened in awe when he told me of the very things I had already learned to love—the night skies and the stars that twinkled in them. This man, gray-bearded at the time and undoubtedly

in his grave long since, showed me that our earth was only one of many thousands of worlds hurtling through unbounded space, and that it was one of the relatively small and insignificant worlds in the great solar system which he described to us in words that youthful minds could understand. In order to impress on us what he said, we were asked to return and view the moon through his marvelous telescope. We actually gazed upon the mountains, deserts, and great valleys of another world. The thrill has never entirely passed away.

A different conception of God from any I had ever before entertained began to grow upon me. Previously I had honestly believed that He had created nothing of any consequence but the earth and man to whom He had given dominion over it. All living and inanimate things on earth were intended solely for the use of man. Nothing else mattered. To my mind God had chosen the earth as the center of everything. All the rest of the solar system, which was limited to the sun, the

moon, and the visible stars, was of no importance at all in a scheme which made the earth and its lords all that the Creator cared for, even the least little bit. God had numbered each hair of my head and He noted the fall of the sparrow, not because of His tremendous love, but merely as a part of a great scheme where every word, act, and thought was posted up on one side or the other of each person's account against the terrible day when he or she would receive a wonderful reward or be cast out into everlasting punishment.

Now the God who had seemed so austere and pitiless, so meticulously insistent that I should believe thus and so, and even more imperative that I should profess what I believed and declare it in ordained manner, became not only romantically interesting but intensely admirable. There could be a friendly, even chummy, relation between us. Admiration for Him who had put on the moon mountains which I had seen with my own eyes banished the fear which the Church had incul-

cated. God was a great fellow, well worth cultivating.

Perchance, the conception of God which came to me in Wakeman will seem to many as being no less strange than that understanding which it displaced in my young mind. It was, however, the first step, and a necessary one, in the building of the great and lasting faith which now makes life so beautiful to me and causes me to look forward to death as but a pleasant interlude which separates one splendid period of my existence from another even more inviting. I had begun to grope my way out of Stygian blackness.

The winter passed far too quickly.

I am not now aware that I learned anything in the school at Wakeman which I probably could not have learned had I remained under the instruction of Mrs. Bacon. But in the big, square wooden building with two floors I began for the first time to acquire an education. Through associations formed there and friends I made within its walls I came to understand that what is learned

by heart from a book is of trifling consequence. I began to think for myself. I began to see life. No matter how many years I might have spent at the Four Corners school, I should never have made even a small start at the acquisition of learning. At Wakeman I made real progress for the first time.

We went back to the farm in May.

Ed came with the team and wagon after a week of preparation which had turned my thoughts again to the big woods, the open fields, and the creek bottoms. He and Dad rode on the big load of household goods and I went with them, though Mother had urged that I go in the buggy with her. Ed had brought my dog, Jack, and together we walked and played for most of the eight long miles.

It was a splendidly warm and beautiful day we chose for our homecoming. Such skies of blue, crossed hither and thither with vagrant fleecy clouds! The balm of springtime was in the air and the gentle wind wafted along the scent

of growing grass and bursting buds. The woods were carpeted with wild flowers. Everywhere there were pools and little streams of sparkling water. Green meadow frogs gaily croaked a Maytime chorus, robins sang their mating songs, and the bluejays and yellow hammers were calling to us from the trees.

Skinny had been on the watch since dawn, and no sooner had our creaking load come around the curve in Bingham's Woods than he was streaking down the road toward us, waving an old black felt hat and whistling shrilly. "Hello, Skinny!" "Hello, Slip!" We didn't shake hands or say much. Just looked at each other, with faces wrinkled into broad grins. "My gosh, you're home, ain't you?" "Yep!" Then we fell into step and walked side by side behind the load to our home.

Mother had gotten there ahead of us and Jeanne had come over to help. How wonderfully tall and beautiful she had become during these few months I had been away. Something

queer happened to my heart when she caught me up in her arms and kissed me. My Jeanne was changed. She had received the final crown of glory of her maidenhood and was now a woman grown.

But that feeling didn't last long. Soon she had won again her old place in my life, though now there was to be no more teasing or mischief making from me. The very next day we again sat on her porch and talked while she brushed her beautiful hair. Somewhat reluctantly, it seems to me now, I again suffered her to look deep into my heart, and what she found there of greatest interest on this occasion were the abiding impressions I had gained while haunting a small shop in Wakeman where a motherly white-haired lady kept a stock of magazines. Somehow my very soul seemed to be dragged forth as I pored over the long table on which those periodicals were displayed. Scarcely a day had passed but that I visited them. My heart would beat faster as I read the names of the authors and pondered

over the wonderful stories they had written. Toward the end of the winter I had mustered courage actually to write some of the editors, and I had been rewarded with two or three replies.

Jeanne understood.

To me she seemed again the most wonderful person in the whole world, not even excepting my lovely mother, who could not then realize that a steadily increasing passion to write had lodged within me and become the guiding star of my destiny. I now had remembrances of many other girls possessed of both charm and beauty, but unconsciously I weighed them always with my Jeanne and found them worthy only as they approached her in beauty of face and form or in sweetness of character. It is hard to break down a boyhood ideal.

For a moment her serious expression changed. She laughed and her blue eyes shone as she held up her arms so her radiant hair would gather the warmth of the sun. "You must write harder

than ever, Jimmy," she said. "Some day you'll put me in a story, won't you?"

Were those just cheerful words of hope and encouragement which fell from Jeanne's lips as naturally as gentle showers fall from an April cloud? Or did my Jeanne then look far into the future and seek thus to urge me to keep on in the path where I had so firmly set my feet? Bless her dear heart! I don't know how many times I have written her into the pages of my books.

In all fairness, life should have brought much happiness to Jeanne. I sincerely hope that it has. And I wonder if she sometimes thinks of the happy hours of our childhood, when I was "Jimmy" to her and she was "Whistling Jeanne."

CHAPTER IV

SCHOOLDAYS IN OWOSSO

I remember the gleams and glooms that dart
Across the school-boy's brain;
The songs, and the silence, in the heart
That in part are prophecies, and in part
Are longings wild and vain.
And the voice of that fitful song
Sings on and is never still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."
—HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

OUR sojourn at Wakeman had been a dynamic change for me. It proved a stepping stone in my progress toward the land which I had first glimpsed that day in Sandusky. While we remained in Wakeman something had been planted in my heart which cried out against my staying long on that stony backwoods farm. Not that I had grown ashamed of the little home or that the privations of our simple pioneer life had begun to

gall me. Rather, as it now appears to me, I had unknowingly dedicated my life to the attainment of something there unobtainable, something which I did not clearly understand but which drew me away as relentlessly as a compass needle veers toward the magnetic pole.

I did not understand what was growing up within me, nor why it was developing. Never before had I appreciated Nature and its wonderful manifestations more, but nevertheless there was constantly present a yearning that would simply not be denied, a desire that daily and insistently urged me to go away again to school in town the next autumn. I tried so hard to make Skinny understand about it on our tramps, but I could not do so. He became greatly excited and waxed eloquent when he related to me his hunting adventures during the winter I was at Wakeman, but did not enthuse at all when I attempted to make him see the wonderful things which the itinerant astronomer had shown me in the starry skies. He simply couldn't see why I should ever

want to leave our beloved haunts again, and for that matter I do not believe that I myself understood why I wanted to go.

Nevertheless the desire to leave and again go to school in town burned so fiercely within me that it could not be quenched, and as if in answer to a prayer my sister Amy came all the way from Michigan to visit us that summer. She understood and ultimately she overcame my mother's objections. So it was decided that I should return with her to Owosso for more schooling when the autumn term opened.

"Gee, I'll never see you again," gasped Skinny when he heard that I was going two hundred miles away. His eyes fairly popped, and his breath cut itself in two, for a mile was a long way to a country lad in those days and to his grief-stricken soul Owosso was on the other side of the United States, or a little beyond. As the time for my departure approached I sometimes saw tears in my mother's eyes, which she struggled valiantly to hide. Father became more thoughtful

and sober of mien. My dog Jack followed me about in a strangely quiet manner, as though he sensed that something terrible and tragic was impending, and his great brown eyes seemed filled with a silent prayer that I should not again leave him.

On the appointed day the buckboard stood outside, and I took my place in it clad in my new home-made suit, with the first long pants I had ever worn, ready for yet another of the great events which have left their imprint so indelibly upon my life. "He isn't my little boy any more," sobbed Mother, and even Jeanne began to cry. Hot tears welled into my own eyes so I could scarcely see those I loved. But eventually my sister comforted them, and as we drove away Skinny sadly called to me: "Good-bye, Slip. Gee, I'll never see you again!"

I shall not try to understand how he knew that tragedy rode with us down the winding road and that the few months I was to be away would lengthen into years. Looking back upon that day,

I now see the mysterious and inevitable surety with which one's destiny mounts the storm and walks upon the wind. Had I then known that the train which was to bear me away from the little station at Ceylon would take me from the beloved haunts of my early schooldays and the stony old farm forever, I would have been unable to endure the long hours and interminable miles before we pulled in at the old Michigan Central Junction House, but two blocks from where I was born and near which Charley Miller and I had so often played together.

Next day my sister escorted me about the town, and it was as though she had unlocked an ancient chest to wipe the dust from pictures long ago laid away there. Seven years is a great space of time in the life of a boy.

Our old home had been transformed into Green's Hotel and the room in which I was born had been given over to the entertainment of drummers. There were no hickory trees in the streets and the big pines on the common had been

replaced with stores and dwellings. None knew what had become of Charley Miller after the death of his father.

Wood's handle factory, surrounded by piles of hickory logs from the butts of which sugary sap oozed and congealed as of yore, was exactly where I had left it, and not changed a bit. Kate Russell, whose rampant bustle I had so ardently desired to ride, brought me a pie the very first day after I arrived. And the beautiful Shiawassee, glorious river of my dreams in later years, still flowed in graceful curves through the town, ready to entice me to its shining waters to swim and fish.

Owosso had prospered and had become a beautiful little city where more than eight thousand had their homes. To me also it was "home," and it has always remained so. Many ties bind me to it and always I return there, no matter into what little-known byways of the world I wander. In Owosso I shall end my journey.

Where one is born a bit of the heart always remains, though misery and poverty may be as-

sociated with it. I experienced only a little lonesomeness for the stony Ohio farm, and gradually my yearning for Skinny and Jeanne passed away. My recollections of the time when I manfully bore the burden and the heat of the long day over my stone piles grew to be but precious memories about which there is the odor of lavender and the charm of old lace.

Of all the ties which in my boyhood bound me to Owosso, none was stronger than my love for the Shiawassee, "Sparkling Waters." Soon after I had returned to the city my truant feet were irresistibly drawn to its banks. The river gripped me at once. Memories of earliest childhood flew back to me like birds upon the wing. This was the running water with mystic lure I had visioned in those rhapsodies of boyhood romance which "give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name." This was the stream which had run like a silver thread through my subconscious life, destined now to become my life-long partner in sorrow and in joy, my urge to adventure and my

inspiration to attempt great things. At once I began a story about the river; and I wrote a letter to Skinny to tell him that on its bosom we would first embark when our day came to strike out together for fame and fortune.

Nothing can reveal to a man more surely the sublimity of life, and nothing more inspire courage and faith, than a stream of running water dancing in the sunlight, singing over the rapids or around unsurmountable obstacles, and thoughtful as it passes the solitudes. Such was the Shiawassee of my boyhood—my river—clean and refreshing as it flowed along on all the pride of its ancient lineage. Would to God the greed and selfishness of modern commerce had refrained from polluting it! Verily, nothing is sacred to the overlords of business! Nevertheless, the Shiawassee of my childhood remains among my most cherished memories, to comfort and to cheer, and when I pass through the velvety twilight called death I am sure, as I was then, that it will be the spirit of my river which bears my soul on into the more

splendid life which my faith teaches me I shall be about to enter joyfully.

It was not long afterward that I went with my sister Amy to pay a visit to the young man, Fred Janette, who had manifested an interest in the stories I was writing back on the Ohio farm. I had read every one of his serials that I could find in *Golden Days,* and now, athrill with the excitement of actually seeing one of these supermen who wrote tales that were actually printed, I came to the holy portals of his home. To me that old-fashioned, one-story cottage of extremely modest appearance was the palace of a king. Its door was opened by a tall, whiskered Frenchman whom I afterward regarded almost as a father, and we were greeted by a plump, white-haired woman who still holds a place in my heart but little lower than that dedicated to my own mother.

While my sister chatted and laughed, not at all frightened in the presence of such august personages, I could hear the rapid clicking of typewriter keys from behind the closed door of a

room at the end of a hall. I have met many of the savants and literati of the earth, have known nobility and even royalty, but were all of them on bended knees before me their homage could not approach that which I was then prepared to lay before my great ideal. "Fred is writing on his story," said his mother. "We will wait a little while."

Presently the sound of the typewriter ceased, the door opened, and the great writer-man came out. Instantly he broke down all barriers and banished all my fear and awe. Coming forward in that swift and nervous way he has, he smiled gladly, grasped both my hands, and said: "So this is our young author!"

Then Fred took me into his "den," a room that was gloriously littered with books and papers and pages of manuscript. He kept me there an hour, showed me a check for three hundred dollars the editor of *Golden Days* had just sent to him, and told me what he was doing and how he accomplished his task. Just think of it! Three

hundred dollars actually paid for words—just words—words that you brought out of your head, and which didn't cost a cent! What a huge sum of money! And he had called me a "young author" and assured me again and again that I could not help but become successful if I would put my whole heart into my writing. For months the stupendous possibilities he displayed to my wondering eyes kept my blood racing through my veins.

The great man was delicately careful not to treat me as a small boy. From our first meeting he accepted me as a comrade, told me to come to see him often, and extended a friendship that I have prized these many years. Dear heaven, is it possible that I now arouse such a thrill in the breasts of young people, hopefully and mysteriously urged, who call upon me? Is it possible that I can stir the heartstrings of boys and girls as that writer-man stirred mine? God forbid that I refuse them all the help and encouragement

they seek, which may be within my power to bestow!

Schooldays came all too soon, though there was never a moment but that I quite understood that school was very necessary and important to one who would be a great author. I shall never fully understand how I could want so much to go away to school and yet find it so very uninteresting when I got there. I was put in the seventh grade. Such was the estimate of the superintendent concerning what I had accomplished under Mrs. Bacon and at Wakeman. After a fashion I muddled through all the classes and eventually finished the tenth grade; but while I realized the importance of school, I never could overcome my dislike for it.

Miss Curliss referred to me as her "hopeless horror" in algebra. Miss Needles became hysterical one day when I stoutly maintained that a "skipper" was a bug in cheese rather than the master of a vessel. She never acknowledged that I was anything but just plain dumb. Little Mr.

Chaffee once declared that my empty mind was the outstanding feature of the Owosso public schools. My experiences in the schoolroom were of such a harrowing nature that they sometimes yet recur to me in nightmares. But for Miss Boyce, who was exquisitely pretty, and Miss Bartrem, who never lost patience with me, my schooldays in Owosso would have been a period of absolute drudgery and terror. To their interest, cheer, and encouragement is due what little I did actually accomplish there. Though Professor Austin, the principal, sympathized in a way with my comings and goings up and down the river, he once told me bluntly that if he ever heard of a prize for stupidity in the classroom he would see that it was awarded to me.

From the first, the Shiawassee had taken its destined place as my greatest teacher and the guardian angel of my fate. In fair weather or foul, regardless of the season, I was up at dawn to visit my muskrat and mink traps along its banks. I caught scores of them between the two

bridges at Washington and Oliver streets, a half-mile stretch which even then was in the heart of the residential part of Owosso. By the time my second school year in Owosso had begun the river had claimed me utterly. I had traps, a gun, and my Indian dugout canoe.

Under my white skin I was almost an Indian myself. When not actually in school I was either writing stories of the wild or living them, and, without any bad intention on my part, had developed into a real problem for my teachers. Frequently I was called upon to explain my absences from assembly, and the fact that I was up at daybreak, had skinned my catch before breakfast, and after that had got ready for school, while most of my companions were still slumbering or possibly doing a few easy chores about the house, seldom was accepted as sufficient to exculpate me. Once when I came tip-toeing to my seat in the middle of an invocation being offered by Professor Austin he caught sight of me from the corner of his eye and finished with: "And dear

Lord, we thank Thee for returning Nimrod safely to us this morning." From that day on my nickname at school was "Nimrod."

Being given by my brother-in-law the choice between a trip to the World's Fair at Chicago or a gun, I unhesitatingly chose the gun, and after that I explored the woods far down the Shiawassee. We were then comparatively in the heart of a splendid wild country. Great reaches of timber came to our very doors, and where the sugar-beet factory now stands, smoke belching from its towering chimneys, was the beginning of my favorite hunting ground. Rabbits and squirrels were almost as thick as in pioneer days, and partridges were plentiful. Small fur-bearing animals of all kinds could readily be found in the timber up and down the creeks which emptied into the river. The lureful "north country" was just on the other side of our house, the paradise of my dreams, which grew wilder with each mile one tramped in it and held out to me temptingly the irresistible enticement to adventure.

Toward the end of the first winter after my return with my sister Amy to Owosso Mother's yearning for Jimmy caused Father to write that I would have to go back to the farm unless he could find some way to reunite us in Owosso, and he promised that he would do everything possible to permit the family again to make its home there. Dear old Dad! With an uncomplaining heart he had gone away from his old Owosso friends and cherished associations seven years before because such action seemed then the only practicable one. But he had learned to love Owosso, and the sacrifice was a terrific one.

My sister cried with joy and I cried, too, but without any clear comprehension why. My river and the farm were both tugging at my heart-strings and I simply didn't know which I wanted most—to continue the new life which had opened to me, or to go back to Skinny and Jeanne and my old dog Jack. Before I could reach a decision the question was settled by Mother and Amy. In the spring my parents and sister Cora arrived—

bag and baggage—and Father established a little cobbling shop, painted red, between the old city hall and Merrick Blair's ancient and picturesque gun shop. My brother Ed remained behind; and because Jack was not with the family, Mother had to tell me the truth, which had been withheld, that he had died just a month to the day after I had left the farm, and had been buried under the big sweet-apple tree.

For many years father mended other people's shoes in the old-fashioned way, with needle and thread and wooden pegs. He never shirked and never did less than his best, believing always that he ought to be the harshest critic of his own work; so, while he never earned great sums of money, he always stood high in the estimation of most of the townsfolk. Many times have I seen him step aside with his hat in his hand when ladies approached, and stand like an aged cavalier making his obeisance to his queen as they passed. In all my life I never heard him swear or tell a coarse story. For many years he cobbled and

cobbled. His hair and beard grew white, but he was straight as a ramrod, held up his head proudly, and bore his burdens without complaint. No boy could possibly have a finer example than my father daily offered to me.

My own life story contains few outstanding events during these years. My river was paramount, of course, and then there was the drilling of the boys' brigade at the Baptist Sunday School, the boxing in Bigelow's barn, the frequent battles engendered by the ancient feud between the East Side boys and those of West Town, which originated at a time "whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary" and from causes also lost in the dim byways of the past, as well as the chores and odd jobs that every boy in the small towns thirty-odd years ago had to undertake. On Saturdays I worked in Fred Crowe's store, for which I was paid fifty cents.

I loved to hunt, fish, play ball, skate, toboggan, and do all other things which called for physical activity in large measure. With these and my

river, and my writing, there were no dull and unoccupied moments in any day. Girls played no part in my life worth recording. Once I mustered the courage to ask Nell Carpenter to go with me to a party at Vera Haskell's home, but we separated a block from our destination, each going on alone, and when the hour for departure came we each managed to slip away alone, and met again where we had previously parted, so no one could guess what intimate friends we had become. Once Ernie Gould and I combined our courage and called on Florence Ayers, but she closed and locked the screen door in our faces. In these days of boyish "sheiks" and adolescent Dulcineas, it may be impossible for my younger readers to comprehend that such a person as I could have ever existed, but I was not far different in these particulars from other boys whom I knew. Love affairs and social excitement simply did not interest us.

Not long after the family had returned to Owosso Father bought a modest little home in

the curve of the river which nearly encircles my present castle study, and Mother fitted up my bedroom with a desk and table. Then Father bought me a second-hand Caligraph typewriter and made a stand for it out of a discarded sewing machine, the top of which he covered with yellow oilcloth. Thus did they signify to me that they had at length seen the enchanted land of my dreams and had chosen to enter through the gates I had timidly opened to them some five years before. Gladly were they welcomed, and thereafter it was their constant pleasure to come to my room where I read them the stories I had written. Father would nod his head gravely and say, "Fine, Jimmy, that's fine!" I can almost hear their voices and see my mother's happy tears when I go into that hallowed room. Again I see them listening intently as I read, my voice quivering with the emotion which I could never quite keep back as I thus transformed my brain children into the flesh-and-blood realism of spoken words.

Their interest in my chosen work never waned. Through all the years of my young manhood I drew much encouragement from Dad and Mother. Even after I had won a place among America's well-known writers, my father was my constant comrade and Mother was always available as my counselor and guide, a refuge in adversity and my confidante concerning all my plans and actions. Freely I opened my heart to her and disclosed my innermost thoughts. She helped me plan my novels and her kindly criticisms and suggestions assisted me through my most difficult work. Such bonds as held me to my mother do not part asunder easily, and when she passed on, though it was apparent for months that the angel of death was hovering near, it seemed for the moment that my world had gone dark and that the sun would never shine again. After my tale *The Alaskan* was published, something which the critics have not been able to point out very well has been missing from my books. On the day she

was lowered into her grave a part of my heart was interred there with her.

Before my parents provided me with that little studio in our old home on John Street I had written with a pencil and on any kind of paper I could get, chiefly wrapping paper from the stores which I cut into sheets. A few years ago a large part of my earliest manuscripts were destroyed, but I still have a big pine packing case filled with them. Before I was fifteen years old I had written more than a hundred stories ranging in length from five hundred to twenty thousand words. When struggling authors tell me how discouraged they are because their half-dozen stories have been rejected I would they could go down the winding stairs to the dungeon keep of Curwood Castle and gaze on that great box of voiceless but significant reminders of my own years of toil before I received my first check of five dollars for a story.

The first story of mine to appear in print at all, "The Fall of Shako," appeared in our local

paper, the *Argus,* years before anyone could be persuaded to pay me for my work. It was inspired by explorations made with my brother-in-law near Chesaning, where there is a great river bottom known as Shako's Flats, on which tradition has it an Indian chief called Shako and his forces were utterly annihilated after a most sanguinary fight. George Campbell, who owned and edited the *Argus* then, published the story with my name, JAMES CURWOOD, in bold type at the top, little thinking that it would stir up excitement in Owosso almost as great as that of an earlier day when Sullivan, a cruel murderer, was taken from the jail at Corunna, three miles away, and lynched.

For some time previously a veterinary named Joplin, who owned a livery stable in Owosso, had nursed an intense dislike for my father, and Dave Blair, seeing a chance for a little fun, asked him what he thought of "old man Curwood's story in the *Argus.*" Father's name was James, also, and the veterinary's hasty conclusion that Dad had

written that juvenilish yarn was quite natural after all. So he sat himself down and prepared a criticism which would have done credit to Sir Benjamin Backbite himself. His pen was a red-hot barb of steel, his ink blue vitriol, and my poor dad his unfortunate victim.

George Campbell, a very quiet and unemotional man—a Master Mason along with my father—had a deep sense of humor and instantly perceived the possibilities of publishing Joplin's criticism, for though the veterinary made it clear in his talk that he was lampooning Dad, his written article gave no evidence at all but that he was attacking me, as, indeed, both my father and I, as well as many of our friends, thought he was.

Joplin called my tale "a mess of asinine and senseless drivel, an insult to the town and a blot upon the intelligence of the community." There was much more in similar vein. I was flung from my suddenly achieved glory into a pit of despair and gloom. But George Campbell, knowing that "criticism will make a man," smiled as his own

joke returned upon him like a boomerang in the form of scores of letters from outraged citizens who protested against a grown man like Joplin hurling himself as a vengeful Goliath upon a mere schoolboy. The roar of an angry town sent Joplin shivering into retirement, and acquainted him with the fact that it was I, and not my father, who had written "The Fall of Shako."

Then came the epic comment of Fred Janette, who had gone to New York, in which he opined that Joplin had shown himself "a superlative ass," and because Fred signed his name to it and had become a great man in our eyes, his verbal castigation of the veterinary, every word as sharp and refreshing as wind from a wintry sea, caused the local storm to break out anew. Most of our eight thousand citizens formed very decided opinions concerning the controversy, and a majority of them wrote those opinions to the editor of the *Argus*. My name got into the city papers and the Detroit *Journal* asked me to write a story for it. God bless you, Fred! You were the

first man to encourage me to write and the first to raise me to fame. Will I ever be able to repay you for that magnificent defense of a frightened schoolboy written November 21, 1894, which appears in a yellowing clipping from the *Argus* lying on my desk as this is being written?

Only the day before I was less than nobody—a presumptuous lad who had broken into print and had instantly been shown unworthy of the position to which he aspired, for it must be conceded that "The Fall of Shako" was not a masterpiece, even for a schoolboy. Now, however, a doughty champion had ridden into the lists, and by virtue of his support I had again ascended into the heights where fame and glory could rest upon me. Almost everyone in Owosso now knew that a boy named Jimmy Curwood lived over on John Street, and not a few were certain he had it in him to become a real author. They knew it in Corunna and even in Maurice and Perry—in fact, wherever the *Argus* went to its two thousand subscribers.

It was, however, the Detroit *Journal* letter which enthroned me on the pinnacles of highest bliss, and as fast as possible I sent them a number of other tales, from which they selected and published "Pontiac's Last Blow" and "The Angel of Heaven." The solemnity and grandeur of recognized achievement made for me a halo of glory, although I received no pay at all for my contributions. Then I conceived the idea that, instead of writing for boys, my destiny was to thrill the souls of older people. So I took up society and love, and in place of my tales of woods and streams I produced a drama of heart throbs which I then firmly believed to be the very essence of art and literary craftsmanship, a story gem which was published under my inspired title, "The Girl with the Rareripe Lips and Raven Hair." I had thought to publish it again here, so that the multitude of young folks in each generation who have dreams of attaining literary fame might compare it with my subsequent work and take courage. More mature judgment has convinced

me, however, that this product of the creative genius of a youth equipped with a good dictionary and a book of synonyms had better be left in the ancient archives. Some unkind critic may find it, but not with my help.

Very soon after "The Girl with the Rareripe Lips and Raven Hair" appeared in the Detroit newspapers, Fred Janette, who had returned from New York, took me into his den and with great seriousness told me why it would not do. He made me understand that a considerable time must elapse before I could hope to receive pay for my stories, and he counseled me to undertake a juvenile serial. That winter I composed two of about twenty thousand words each, one called "The Rebel Quintette" and the other "Firelock of the Range." These pencil-scrawled manuscripts, yellow with age, are among those I sometimes show to those whom I sincerely desire to understand what is not good writing. Neither was ever published.

My native love for writing, encouraged by the

interest shown by Dad and Mother, drove me ever on, and Fred and his mother did their best to see that my inexhaustible energy and lively imagination were properly guided and controlled. I had no doubt that I was triumphantly on the way to success, though I did not realize how long that road would prove to be, nor how arduous the labor before I should arrive.

I have never believed greatly in the virtue of prayer alone, but as I worked in those years I silently and unconsciously prayed, and the most earnest of my unvoiced supplications was that I might at length write stories which would be printed. Patiently I struggled and resolutely I overcame the fits of despondency and discouragement which came now and then as story after story was repeatedly rejected and returned to me. I came to realize that I must keep everlastingly at it, without faintness of heart, if I was to win, and gradually I grew to understand that it would be little less than a miracle if I should get into a big magazine of wide circulation first.

As fast as I wrote my stories I sent them off to the magazines, and as quickly as one was returned I started it out again. At times I had as many as twenty manuscripts traveling the roads of chance, for I steadfastly clung to the belief that what the rejection slips said was true—that rejection did not imply lack of merit, but rather that the manuscript was unsuited to the needs of the particular publisher who had returned it. The return of a manuscript, or a half dozen of them at once, did not discourage me too much, for often an editor would send along a word of comfort and hope. Once Bob Davis, of *Munsey's Magazine,* scrawled on a printed rejection slip: "Keep at it, kid! You're bound to win." Those eight words were priceless to me. Once John L. Sleicher, the publisher of *Leslie's Weekly,* took the trouble to write me a letter saying he was confident he would some day be accepting all I sent him.

One editor, undoubtedly meaning to be helpful but little thinking what the result would be, lodged

in my juvenile mind the idea that after my name had appeared once in a magazine Table of Contents my battle would be as good as won. Fred Janette most emphatically agreed. Of course, both were merely trying to say to me that after I had progressed far enough to have one of my stories accepted on its own merits I would have learned how to write other stories possessing such merit that they would also be accepted. But the thought which took root was that the mere printing of my name in a Table of Contents was magic enough. I did not grasp the accompanying idea that my name must get there solely on the merit of what I had written. I think few boys of fifteen years would.

I have always had a warm sympathy for plagiarists who are very young, for I know their overwhelming and irresistible desire to force open the gate that bars their pathway to success. I know it is rarely dishonesty or a yearning for money that has inspired them. They have said to themselves that anything which has once been

printed will surely be accepted again, and then the thought has come: "If I can once get my name in a magazine, all the other editors will take notice and give favorable consideration to what I submit." They forget that to be a successful plagiarist one must not only find something good which has already been printed, but something which the next editor to whom it is offered will not suspect of having been previously published. To the adolescent mind, as I now recall my own adventure under the skull and crossbones of literary piracy, that is not so difficult, for the contents of any periodical a dozen years old seemed almost prehistoric to me.

Among my then prized possessions there were bound volumes of a journal of university life and thought published long ago at Cambridge in England. I loved to pore over them, and one evening my evil genii prompted me to copy a bit of verse entitled "A Fragment," change its name to "A Prayer," and send it on to a magazine to which I particularly desired to become a contributor. It

was perfectly safe, I assured myself, for if the author, Byron, whose name was in very small letters at the bottom, had amounted to anything his name would have been prominently printed right under the title. Ten days later I received a small payment for this and a request to submit more equally as good.

I can yet recall the strange expression on Mrs. Janette's face when she read a copy of what I had sold for my own, though at the time I believed it was surprise and pleasure and I wondered a little that she offered me no congratulations. Years later she admitted that she had instantly recognized the verse and had explained the situation to the editor, asking him to say nothing to me then. Probably he was glad enough to escape letting his friends know that he had heedlessly bought for fifty cents from a schoolboy one of Lord Byron's poems.

For some reason, I got no pleasurable thrill from this literary achievement. My mother was

tremendously pleased and Dad's pride was clearly revealed in his face and eyes. But somehow, though I had no qualms of conscience over having imposed on an unwary editor, I began to feel uneasy. Then the disagreeable thought came to me that I had cheated my own father and mother as well as my friends, and for weeks I worried over having sold something I did not write to an editor who should have known better. These thoughts of my dishonorable escapade, however, added temper to my mettle and I resolved that now I would gird myself, so to speak, and go at the business of writing my own thoughts with more determination than ever.

I have not so offended again, but once a few years after this incident I was guilty of an unintended plagiarism. I read a story in a Sunday paper describing how an enterprising young American had engaged in a most unusual business venture over the border in Mexico. I wrote this into fiction and sold the story, quite unaware that the writer of the article I had read was also

writing fiction, and not news, and that he had taken his idea from a story by O. Henry.

In the days when I was striving to achieve the first rung of the ladder there were many small magazines which sold for five cents a copy: the *Gray Goose* in Cincinnati, *Redfield's Magazine,* published at Smethport, Pennsylvania, *Wayside Tales* at Detroit, *Four O'Clock* in Chicago, and a dozen others like the *Owl,* the *Oracle,* the *White Elephant,* the *Black Cat,* and *Young's Magazine.* To all of these and others I offered what I wrote, but still retained *Munsey's Magazine* on my list also because the editors so often encouraged me. Across the face of a printed rejection slip Mr. Titherington had once written: *"Almost.* But not quite what we want. Send us a good adventure yarn for *Argosy."* The word "almost" was heavily underscored, and that slip is still among the treasured mementos of my days as a young writer.

Then, early in 1898, after nearly ten years of effort, there came a letter from the *Gray Goose,*

which sent me shouting in my joy through the house, out of which I ran to the Janettes' and then down to my father, who was as greatly pleased as mother had been. The letter was brief, but I showed it to all my friends as proudly as if I had suddenly inherited a crown. It merely said that they would keep my story "Across the Range" and that five dollars was enclosed in payment for it.

And there was the check—the first money I ever earned at writing! If it had been five thousand the thrill could not have been greater. I had won at last, and forthwith I wrote to all the editors who had rejected my stories, making it clear that they had erred seriously. However, I did not succeed in making my point clear, for almost by return mail *Munsey's Magazine* sent back another offering and on the slip was written: "Never heard of the *Gray Goose,* but I congratulate you just the same." Jealousy, I thought. It was preposterous that they had never heard of such a magazine. Probably they were sorry they

hadn't taken the story themselves. Yet I hoped they would not dislike me just because someone else had accepted one of my stories. Those few words from *Munsey's* brought me down to earth again, albeit the descent was very slow.

Bear in mind that I had worked for ten years to earn that small check. A thousand nights by lamplight and more than a thousand days of discouragement had culminated in a remittance of five dollars, but I felt that there was nothing in the literary world to which I might not now aspire.

About this time I began to measure myself with the more appreciative eye of a person who has already achieved merited recognition of his ability. So I got me a printed letterhead, like Fred Janette's, on which my name, which then seemed to be a most common one, appeared as "J. Olivier Curwood." I thought that a distinctive and poetic cognomen, little realizing that critics have long memories and that they are more prone to gloat over an author's oddities

than they are to find and tell of the merit his stories may possess.

Fame and glory, having taken a look at me, passed on, and I resumed the even tenor of my most ordinary and uneventful life, which centered more than ever in the little bedroom my parents had fitted up for my writing. It was love for the work, and never the glamour of the fabled pot of gold which I fancied would be its reward, that drove me on. Next to my river, my little low-ceilinged study was the greatest allurement that life held for me, and my attachment continues until this day.

Our old-fashioned house on John Street still stands within a few steps of my present workshop and my room in it remains unchanged. The same faded paper is on the walls, the same old magazine pictures are tacked about, and the same scant furniture and home-made shelves are there. Ghosts live within its walls to guard the priceless memories. In this room I wrote and dreamed as a boy, and years later, when life seemed for the

moment most terribly barren and hopeless, I returned to it. On the old sewing machine stand with its yellow oilcloth cover I wrote half of the thirty novels which I have had published. In this room of hallowed memories I fought my way through gloom to happiness and success. In it I rose from poverty and obscurity, and I have allowed no innovation to invade it.

In 1922 I erected my present town studio, which I call Curwood Castle because it is a reproduction of an ancient Norman fortress, at the very edge of the river where Dad and I so often fished together, but I have never torn down the old home that stands within twenty feet of my tower room, shutting off the view entirely toward the south and the street. Every "practical" consideration prompts me to raze the old home and add its grounds to those of Curwood Castle, but thus far I have lacked the courage to do so, for I shall not be able to restore it if I find that I miss the inspiration it gives me, strangely driving me on with new hope and resolution.

There are times when I feel that I have been a traitor and have not kept the faith with that little upstairs study and its faded walls and quaint old pictures. Twice since I deserted it for my northern Michigan studio on the Au Sable I have returned and finished a novel on the old sewing machine table. I do not try to explain to my kindly neighbors why I do not tear down the old homestead and surround the Castle with a beautiful garden. Only that little upstairs room and I will ever know just what happened there. The gleams and glooms darting across my schoolboy mind, the songs and silences in my heart have proven prophecies in part, but in part only longings wild and vain. The thoughts of my youth were long, long thoughts. I dare not wreck the shrine that is sacred to them.

CHAPTER V

IN THE OPEN ROADS AND IN THE BIG SWAMPS

I would go down to the seas again
To a vagrant gypsy life;
To the wild gull's way and the whale's way,
Where the wind's like a whetted knife.
And all I ask is a merry yarn
From a laughing fellow rover,
And quiet sleep, with peaceful dreams,
When the long trick's over.

—JOHN MASEFIELD

I HAVE served long among the chosen hosts of Vagabondia—most frequently in that great province familiarly known as "God's Country," a magnificent principality itself, extending from Bathhurst Inlet to the Kaministiquia, between Hudson Bay and the Valley of Silent Men. I am convinced that I shall tread no more the paths where the "gray geese race across the red moon's face from the white wind's Arctic wrath"; nor shall I again

wander in the byways of the land where the lean wolves run. Perhaps I shall have occasion to speak more of the years I spent there before this story of my life is done, for it was in God's Country that I really learned to appreciate this life into which I had been ushered without being asked whether I would or not. The joy of living has been mine in Vagabondia, and now I think is the proper time to recount my first adventures there. Previously I had barely glanced across its borders, but in the years just before the war with Spain I actually strode forth for the first time into the byways that had so greatly enticed me.

The imperial realm of Vagabondia extends from the rising sun unto the far horizon, its northern outposts lighted by the Aurora Borealis—and much of its far-flung territory lies under and beyond the Southern Cross. In this tremendous but invisible empire limiting boundaries, over which grave statesmen have pondered, mean nothing. No officials stand guard at its gateways to demand the passport of a Free Companion, but

all may go or come when and where whim or fancy dictates. Neither race nor creed are of consequence, and all who acknowledge themselves subject to Vagabondia's potentate are comrades bound by the ties of a mystic freemasonry which they alone understand, whether they are wanderers along the hidden paths and byways of the wilderness or numbered among those who go down to the sea in ships.

The gull's way is like unto the way of Niskuk, and the wind which blows over Mackenzie Land cuts as a whetted knife, like the storm winds which toss the wintry sea in mad frenzy. The yarns spun around campfires on the shores of Wollaston are as merry—and on occasion as weird—as those recounted in any forecastle. The songs which seamen sing thrill one no more than do the roaring chants of those who float down the Athabasca. Wherever true Free Companions of Vagabondia are met one finds laughing fellow rovers in whom is the joy of living.

One day in June of 1896 Dad bought me a

second-hand bicycle as a birthday present, a contrivance which I had long dreamed of owning in order that I might see so much more of the world. I learned to ride the same day and very soon I was contemplating a long trip to the north or west—but the best-laid plans of youth "gang aft agley," and I actually went south.

Neither Father nor Mother advanced serious objections when I told them my first stop would be with my cousin, Bert van Ostran. Dad gave me fifty cents and Mother packed my lunch in an old shoe box. Both smiled a little and told me not to awaken them when I left at dawn the next morning. They knew that Bert lived near Williamston, seventeen miles away, and in those days when paved and graveled roads were rarely found, they were confident I would soon return. Neither had quite realized the insistent demand of my Mohawk blood for strenuous action and adventure, the call of the open skies, the winding trails, and the mysterious shadows of the campfires on still, cool nights.

I reached Bert's home that first afternoon, but he was cutting hay with a scythe on a farm about a mile away. I rode on there as fast as I could, and as soon as I had explained my scheme he collected what was coming to him—about two dollars—and together we rode back to his home where that night we completed our plans.

Even the chickens were not awake when we made our first stop the next morning in front of a near-by farmhouse, where Bert whistled cautiously under the second-floor windows. Soon a very pretty girl thrust out her head, and though she was somewhat displeased at being aroused so early, Bertha Colby listened with genuine interest as Bert explained that we were going away—somewhere—and didn't know when we would return. But for the lovely vision she made in the starlit window, we might have gone to the other side of the world, I think. However, the queer little tremble in her voice, only a pleasant memory to me, took such a hold on Bert's heart that our adventure together was cut short and he returned at

the end of the summer to marry her. They still live on that farm near Williamston.

For three months we wandered hither and thither, not once sleeping under any roof other than that of a barn, and as our joint capital at the start was but two dollars and a half, we lived on the country through which we passed. Neither of us had any idea of tincturing the quality of our adventure with money-producing toil. We had a few cooking utensils and a light blanket apiece.

Ordinarily we gathered our vegetables at night in the gardens which were near farmhouses; and we became so adept at selecting tender fowls from chicken roosts that if the owner had been sleeping within a few feet he would not have been aroused by the slight commotion the chosen victim made before its death. After dark we drew as much milk as we desired from cows chewing their cuds in barnyards or open fields. Eggs were not obtained so easily, however. Necessarily they could be taken only in the daytime, and our usual method was to sit down to rest near a barn where

many chickens were observed, and while Bert fanned himself I would search the place, often getting as many as five or six dozen eggs, which we exchanged in the next village for necessities that could be had only in stores.

In the course of our foraging we did many things which will scarcely bear chronicling, but, believe it or not, as your own youthful experiences prompt, we were not fairly to be considered marauding tramps. It was not lawlessness but rather the happy irresponsibility characteristic of all true Free Companions of Vagabondia. Whether you understand and appreciate the distinction between such wanderers as we were and hoboes will depend on your own childhood training and on what you have done in your after years.

Our fascinating outlawry supported us excellently well, and with the exception of an incident near Dayton, Ohio, we quite escaped punishment. That time the farmer whose barn I was searching for eggs came up from the opposite direction to

that from which Bert anticipated he might, and I was caught with nearly three dozen eggs in my blouse. He was a merry fellow, indeed, so after some inquiries and observing how young I was, he insisted that we stay for supper. That meal was a fine one, as I now recall, but then we did not enjoy it at all, for the farmer's wife had apparently fried every one of the eggs I had attempted to steal, and that cheery-voiced fellow kept passing the eggs to Bert and me, saying, "Surely you'll have some more eggs," until his wife took pity on us and made him desist.

We had started out from Williamston with the idea of reaching the Mississippi somewhere near St. Louis, but while in eastern Indiana we swung over into Ohio, and about ten days after our adventure near Dayton we crossed the river into Kentucky and toured the eastern part of that state, returning one bright morning to Covington. I had formed a plan meanwhile to return to the stony farm in Erie County, Ohio, that I might see Skinny and Jeanne again, but in Cov-

ington our plans were again entirely altered. Neither David Raine nor Philip Weyland more quickly or unexpectedly changed a previously contemplated course of action.

I was standing alone on a wharf watching the final preparations for the trip on one of those picturesque river boats just about to start for Cairo and New Orleans. I must have made a pathetic and forlorn picture, for I was very thin and my clothes had become badly worn. I doubt not that I had a hungry look in my face and eyes.

A short distance away a vivacious blonde, dressed in the very height of fashion, was laughing and talking with some fine gentlemen, and observing that I was apparently the subject of their conversation and the cause of their mirth, I was about to move away when the little lady approached and began talking to me so sweetly that at once she won me completely. Presently she invited me to go on the boat with her as far as Cairo, and on learning that Bert would soon return from a trip to buy some crackers and cheese,

she included him in the invitation. Though she seemed rather surprised to find him so much older and larger than I, she took us both aboard with her and for several days and nights I had one of the most wonderful trips I had ever heard of, ate three big meals a day, and was splendidly mothered and cared for. From the pilot house to the engine room she was a prime favorite. One day the captain himself took us all over the boat, and wherever we went my dainty companion was so comradely and sweet that all the men went out of their way to do the things which would please her.

She paid little attention to Bert but was perfect toward me, always doing something to make the trip more pleasant. At Louisville she bought me some new bicycle clothes. But something happened shortly after we left there which quite upset her and she left the boat at a little-known stop, the name of which I do not now recall. On leaving she gave me ten dollars and said that Bert and I

should go on down to Cairo as we had planned at first.

Subsequently Bert told me he had learned that she was one of the most widely known sporting women of the period, traveling up and down the two big rivers, that she made it her business to get acquainted with men who got on at the various landings along the way and often played cards all night, and that she had taken us on board as the result of a bet—which recalled to my mind the fact that I had seen one of the fine gentlemen at Covington give her a handful of money from what seemed to be a perfectly enormous roll of bills. I have often wondered what sent her so hurriedly from the boat and why she was so evidently perturbed about it. But no matter how far outside the pale she may have gone, the gay little rogue was sweet and good to me, and I shall always remember her as one of my dearest friends.

Our trip down the river had caused me to abandon the idea of going back to the old farm that

season, and as the vision of Bertha Colby leaning out of the starlit window was always urging Bert to go back, we were soon on our wheels again, making a bee-line for home, where I arrived only a little late for the beginning of school, but as tough as a green apple in July.

The next few months eventually passed. My time outside of school hours and that required for chores was divided between my river and the little low-ceilinged study which my parents had fitted up in our old-fashioned home on John Street which I have already described. Torn between the obvious necessity for completing my education as my parents desired and the continuing call of the wilderness, it became perfectly apparent soon after the mid-winter holidays that one influence or the other must give way. I think no one but my mother then realized how hard I tried to be a dutiful and obedient son. Only she could guess the overwhelming and insistent urge to adventure which had apparently been born in me.

A glorious spring came on early in 1897. Sap was running freely by the middle of March and warm days melted the heavy snows and brought the robins weeks earlier than usual. Pools and rivulets and creeks have always had a fascination for me, and this spring they were everywhere. The Shiawassee overflowed its banks and went roaring by our home, bearing strange masses of driftage with it. I went to sleep each night lulled by its moaning turmoil, and was awakened each morning to see it froth and foam as it inundated the little island which normally existed in the channel opposite our kitchen door. It beckoned me always toward the deep swamp and trackless forest hunting grounds thirty miles away, where the Shiawassee, the Bad, and the Flint came from different directions to empty their flood waters into the Saginaw, making the "Bad River Country," the "Big Marsh," or "St. Charles Marshes," as that section was variously called, into an inland sea. At length I could resist no longer, and I wrote Skinny, urging him to join

me in Owosso that we might set out together on the broad Shiawassee for fame and fortune.

No reply came; and with the April showers and flowers the strain on me became too great. One afternoon I brought home all my textbooks and assured my parents that my story writing was of much greater consequence than the few remaining weeks of school—that it was positively necessary for me to go into the Big Marsh at this particular season in order to gather material for a serial I was preparing for the editor of *Golden Days*. It didn't occur to me to add that the editor did not then know I was preparing a serial for him, nor did it occur to me that he might not be appreciative of the interest I was taking in supplying him with a suitable tale for his periodical.

A quarter of a century ago parents did not look upon school quite as seriously as they do now, and to lose a few weeks, even at examination time, was not then regarded as a matter of life or death,

so I had little difficulty in obtaining the required permission.

Only a few years before, the Shiawassee, the Flint, and the Bad rivers had formed a wild and picturesque waterway into the very heart of Michigan's richest treasure of white pine, and an occasional raft of logs still floated down from the hinterlands. Shanty houses, old houseboats, booms, and clumps of spiles still remained silently to remind one of the days when the whole Saginaw Valley was a paradise of timber that reverberated to the thundering crash of century-old trees and resounded with the noises of the wild and reckless life of five thousand woodmen.

As early as 1894 I had begun to make expeditions toward the Bad River Country, first with my father and Mace Wood, but afterward alone. Here for the first time I had found myself in an uninhabited region, a vast solitude tenanted only by occasional wood or timber poachers and a few Indians who still hunted or trapped there. For weeks at a time one could bury oneself in this

fascinating wilderness without the sight or sound of man.

St. Charles was only twenty-two miles by rail from Owosso, and from there one could readily float in a few hours down the Bad; or one could start from our back door and follow the winding Shiawassee fifty miles to the same destination in about two days.

There he would find himself in a veritable paradise for fish and game in the heart of a wilderness kingdom. Monster pike would leap out at the minnows or frogs cast with bamboo poles almost before the bait struck the water, and spinners would lure a sudden rush of savage life wherever one threw them in the dark and silent depths of hidden bayous or slumbrous straight-waters. Millions of perch and bass invaded these happy solitudes. Game was as plentiful as the fish. I have seen a hundred partridges "budding" in the tree tops at one time, and when the waters were high in the spring countless hundreds of wild geese came in, their wings as they rose at

dawn a mile away making a sound like distant thunder. I have seen the sky there in every direction streaked with wild ducks, and the blackbirds, like the pigeons of old, blotted out the sunlight with their numbers. Mink, muskrats, and raccoons were everywhere. Now and then one saw a deer, a wildcat, or a bear, wanderers from farther north; black, red, and fox squirrels chattered in the trees, and wherever a boat or a canoe could force its way there were blue herons, bitterns, helldivers, coots, and snipe. Bees loved these unpeopled regions, and in the proper seasons it was not at all difficult to find a tree containing from twenty to a hundred pounds of the most delicious honey.

To me the night breezes bore a soul-thrilling melody in which I could hear the quacking of the big drakes as they watched over their drowsing flocks, the honking of restless geese, the plaintive cry of a distant coon from its hollow tree home, the lonely but beautiful call of a whip-poor-

will, and everywhere the plashing of fish and muskrats.

The morning after I had brought home my school books I set off afoot for St. Charles, carrying my gun and my dunnage. The sun was just peeking over the tree tops, and as there were no automobiles either to hasten or disturb my progress, a rather difficult jaunt appeared to be ahead of me.

After I passed Chesaning my tramp was largely one of solitude through a low flat country where a few poverty-stricken settlers were struggling for a bare existence. Then I came to those whom I considered my own people, the remnants of a powerful Indian tribe that once had lived and fought in the valley of the Shiawassee. These dispirited survivors now wove baskets during the warm months, but hunted and trapped during the cold ones.

I slept the first night at one of the cabins of these Indian friends of mine, after a supper of fried muskrat, more delicious when properly

cooked than any fowl. Before sun-up the following day I was in St. Charles, where I bargained for a leaky boat at a rental of fifty cents a week, purchased the few supplies I would require, and was on my way down the Bad before most folks had finished breakfast, dipping my oars in the skillful manner which brings only a soft and oily gurgling to the keenest ear.

Half a mile down the river I entered a region supremely and gloriously wild. The Bad was wide, deep, and nearly currentless. Its black and mysterious-looking water wound through impenetrable swamps and uncut timberlands, primeval in its stillness and pregnant with the promise of adventure. My destination was a high spot, about twelve acres in extent, where the slumbrous and slow-moving waters of the Bad joined the more swiftly moving torrent of the Shiawassee. Here was an ancient logging shack where I proposed to establish myself comfortably before nightfall.

Once out of sight of the railroad water tower at St. Charles, the very air itself seemed to thrill

one's soul and set the heart beating faster. I had learned to think of the Bad as an outlaw stealing away into far hiding places. It was so sullen and black and still, with depths so bottomless that the longest fish pole would not fathom them! I feared it, even while I loved it. I would not have attempted to swim in its water, for I would rather have suffered death in any one of a score of other ways than risk ending my life beneath the surface of that river.

When I reached the old cabin I was rather perturbed to find that only about half an acre of my chosen campsite still remained above the flood waters, but believing there would be no further rise, I landed my stores and for an hour worked with my big knife cutting the dry tops of tall marsh grass for a bed. Before the sun was down I had gathered my wood and had softly mattressed one of the old bunks. My fire was nicely started and my necessary equipment arranged in order on a shelf.

By that time the sky all over the swamps was

dotted and streaked with ducks and geese in evening flight, and blackbirds were coming in by the thousands. On all sides of me the country had been inundated, and from the junction of the Shiawassee and the Bad, where I stood, on toward the bay, some forty miles distant, there were interminable stretches of marsh, a paradise of sloughs and bogs and fens abounding with waterfowl. Hastily I pushed my boat into a point of grass and reeds about half a mile from the cabin, over which the ducks and geese were passing, and before darkness fell I had shot a redhead drake and the biggest gray goose that has ever fallen to my lot.

Old-timers in my happy hunting grounds will readily call to mind a Chippewa Indian with lines of great age on his face, called "Muskrat Joe," a mysterious and picturesque character who haunted the swamps like an ancient ghost, coming and going so silently in his slim dugout canoe that he came to be regarded with superstitious awe by those who encountered him in the wilder-

ness byways. As I was going back to the cabin that night he came up behind me as silently as the gathering darkness itself, and as he was about to pass gave me a nod of recognition. I doubt that he ever saw a face once without being able to recognize it again, even years later.

In a moment of pride and exultation I dropped my oars and stood erect in the boat, with both hands holding up the monster gray goose for him to see. I can yet hear Muskrat Joe's grunt of astonishment. He even stopped paddling for a moment, then shot ahead of me and disappeared as if he were ashamed of that small betrayal of his emotion. But when I arrived at my camp Muskrat Joe was waiting for me. He took the goose and examined it. To have shot that winged lord of all the air was a most meritorious achievement in his eyes. A comradely smile spread over his leathery visage, and, patting the bird, he declared in his peculiar mixture of English and the language of his fathers that it was most astonishing that I had done such shooting with my

single-barreled gun. From that moment Muskrat Joe was my friend, as only Free Companions of Vagabondia can be friends. The bonds of such friendships as ours are more potent than the vows taken at the altars of most fraternal orders. I was closer to him after that than any other living white person, man or boy.

He invited himself to my cabin, cleaned and cooked a couple of muskrats he had shot that afternoon, ate supper with me, and then dressed my goose for me afterward. Seeing that he had turned his canoe bottom up before entering the shack, I urged him to stay all night with me, and insisted upon dividing my marsh grass with him, which pleased Indian Joe more than a little.

Early the next morning my new friend left for his own shack, a tumbledown, patchwork of a place constructed with logs, brush, marsh reeds, and dirt, which was concealed in one of the wild and impenetrable fastnesses then to be found along that part of the Shiawassee. I saw no more of him for three days. Then he returned as

silently as he had gone, and to my surprise and joy invited me to abandon my cabin, take all my belongings, and go to live with him. At last I was to become an Indian myself.

For three long and never-to-be-forgotten weeks I lived with Muskrat Joe in his swamp abode, writing intermittently on my serial which afterward was known as "The Mystery Man of Kim's Bayou," and learning in his company that real woodcraft which has opened many strange and mysterious doors to me and enabled me to see farther into the heart and soul of Nature than ever before. The old Indian, once a Chippewa chieftain, had lived for two-score years and more without kith or kin. Like the strange and silent owls of his swamps he came and went. But I am sure that there was in his heart a deep affection for me, though he never did express it otherwise than by asking me to stay with him, when no other white man was accorded a like privilege, and by the interest he showed in my daily writing. I can only guess at the romance and tragedy

stored away in his heart, which might have been shown to me eventually. However, the time came when it was necessary that I return to Owosso, and before I could again come back to the Big Marsh old Muskrat Joe's appointed time had come, and like many of his race before him, he had mysteriously disappeared. To this day no man knows exactly when or where he died.

Not long ago I was the guest of the heir apparent of one who was once the mightiest potentate on earth. But that thousand-year-old castle where he lodged me brought only a ghost of the thrill which still runs in my veins when I recall my visit to the humble dwelling of Muskrat Joe. There I first experienced the pleasure and inspiration of writing my stories with Nature all around me. All the heraldry and pomp of power or wealth cannot produce a similar sensation, nor in my mind can anything take its place. In later years my own cabins have been set far back in wilderness solitudes, and there I have accomplished the best of my life's work.

During the fall and winter months which immediately preceded my sojourn with the old Chippewa chief another boy who is now the internationally known head of a great sanitarium joined with me in making a corn salve which we peddled about the countryside, frequently taking farm products in payment when our patients had no money, an alternative my erstwhile partner now never has to face. Only the wealthy ask his help in these days, when the magic of a consultation with him, or the mere touch of his hand, justifies a substantial fee.

Our trifling profits seemed large to me, and with the approach of the long summer vacation I had visions of making a fortune easily and succeeded in getting another boyhood friend of mine, now the manager of a large importing house, to join in marketing a product which we called the "Infallible Blood Purifier."

Those were the wildly free and profitable days of unrestricted patent-medicine vending, when it was quite generally thought that every human

being should take a certain amount of bottled medicine each year to keep in good health. The maxim of the old days of the Law Merchant—"Let the buyer beware"—was still in force and effect. Our concoction was bitter with cinchona, hot with cayenne, and possessed of almost tragic purgative qualities from the excessive amount of calomel we put into it. On the attractive labels which we used there was printed an inclusive and unreserved guarantee that the contents of the bottle would cure every ailment which human flesh was heir to, not only pimples, boils, and carbuncles, but also goiter or even cancer.

We rented a horse and buggy for two dollars a week, and from the start our trip was an unqualified success. The Infallible Blood Purifier worked, almost while one waited. And in those days a farmer who bought patent medicine wanted it strong. If it tied his mouth into a knot and made him squirm as it sank into his vitals its merit was at once established. Our product possessed those requisites to a marked degree, and

as we exploited ourselves as "advance agents" only, distributing the medicine "at less than cost" simply for publicity purposes, and its really baneful effects were usually delayed for many hours, we reaped a golden harvest and passed on so far that in those days, when automobiles and telephones were unknown in the country districts, we were not overtaken with the just retribution we deserved. Often we sold six bottles to a single customer, and the gullibility of the public may be judged from the fact that we actually sold the stuff to druggists here and there.

While on this trip we wandered into the neighborhood of that stony farm of boyhood days in Erie county, Ohio. The thought of such a visit had been dormant in my mind ever since the preceding summer, when my plans were so suddenly changed at Covington; and the failure of Skinny to respond to my request that he join me in my adventure into the St. Charles Marshes had revived the idea. I would go down soon and find out why he didn't comply with the solemnly made

covenant that we two should set forth together in search of fame and fortune. My new partner on this medicine-vending journey was indifferent concerning where we went so long as business continued brisk.

The joyous thrill of greeting my old friends again grew on me as we neared the old home district. And, too, there was present in my heart the vision of the sensation I would make among these humble folks. As our trip lengthened, our "sales talks" grew, for neither our personal training, nor the law, nor the spirit of the times required us to restrain our imaginations, and we never spoke to the same audience twice. Slickness in appearance and glibness of tongue were the natural results; and as we were wholly innocent of any knowledge that our product was having an overly strenuous, if not deadly, result, I had decided that my homecoming should be not merely an affair of sentiment but also a triumph of business efficiency. At least one bottle of the Infallible Blood Purifier should go into every home! How

we would surprise my brother Ed and his wife!

Along the winding, dusty road from Berlin Heights to Ogontz we did a prosperous business, and I began to see my old-time neighbors again. But, oh, such changes as had happened!

Winnie Wiggins, five years before a tomboy with whom I had played Pom-Pom-Pull-Away and Prison Goal, was the fine young lady who opened the door at her home and failed to see little Jimmy Curwood in the sophisticated young salesman who addressed her. Dr. Benscoter had died, and his lovely daughter Kate had married a stranger from the city and not Ralph Keyser, her boy sweetheart. The red brick schoolhouse had grown so much smaller, apparently, that I was strangely startled, and the chestnut trees down on Willard's place were not half as huge as I had remembered them to be. All about me something was missing, something which had been tremendously vital and important to barefooted Jimmy Curwood only five years before. The lure of the winding road was gone. Now it seemed so drab,

dusty, and weed-grown, and the precious landmarks along it, every one possessed of memories dear to my heart, appeared to have become so small, or ordinary, and so common. My heart was actually choking me as we turned past Willard's place and I looked for the big elm tree in front of Skinny's home, the big Fisher barn, and our old farm just beyond. I hadn't asked questions before, but had simply expected to find the people and the things just as I had left them.

About Skinny's home there was an air of gloom that rather frightened me. The house had become shabby and dilapidated. Weeds and tall grass were struggling up all around. I missed the cheery presence of the scores of chickens they used to have. Even the birds were silent in the surrounding trees. Life seemed to have departed. When I knocked at the door a hollow, ghostly sound came back to me, and after knocking two or three times I looked in a window. No one lived there!

Our own old home had become but a small

square farmhouse, and the barn behind it was insignificant. Everything, even the orchards near by, seemed so diminutive and unimportant as compared with my memories of them.

To the woman who opened the door at Fisher's place, it was of no significance that I used to live across the road. The problem of making a living there had become harder, and the grim task of existing at all had crushed out all her appreciation of the romance and glory of just living, if she had ever possessed the power to understand and appreciate it at all. With no show of emotion, she let me know that Jeanne's father had died, that the family had broken up, and that Jeanne had married and was now living in a tiny, age-stricken cottage some miles away, at which we had failed to stop, as a sale seemed so unlikely. What a tragedy! Jeanne, my beautiful Jeanne, married and living there! I had not yet learned that love might abide, like a beautiful flower, even in a cottage with broken window-panes and other evidences of poverty about it.

Then I asked about Skinny—Clarence Hill—and stark, cold tragedy overwhelmed me. "Oh, he's dead," was the reply.

I cannot remember that I asked that stranger woman any other question. I think I merely stood stunned for a moment and then went back to the rig. I guess my face was white and filled with grief and horror, for my partner reached out a hand to help me in, something he had never done before.

We made no more stops between there and my brother's home in Florence. Dimly I saw that Black's great woods, where I had so often hunted, had gone, and Bingham's Woods was only a field of stumps. Dad's little cobbling shop had gone, too. The only familiar landmark was the great sweet-apple tree under which my dog Jack lay buried. And as I recognized it, it took all my courage to refrain from sobbing aloud.

So distressing had been my return to the old home that I did not experience the anticipated thrill of pleasure when I met my brother and his

wife, though both were amazed and delighted to see me.

We had planned to stay with Ed for a week, but a few nights after our arrival my brother came into the house very much excited and directed us to hitch up and drive away at once. The Infallible Blood Purifier, "that damned stuff of yours," as Ed called it, had worked with terrific results, "raised the very devil," as Ed put it. The countryside through which we had operated had found out where we were staying, and the sheriff was on his way from Berlin Heights to catch us, although we had violated no laws then commonly understood and enforced. While we didn't know it, that same sheriff would have proven our only friend had we remained. Half the countryside had been made ill, and we would certainly have been tarred and feathered and ridden away on a rail unless he had saved us by putting us into his jail.

However, we tarried not on the order of our departing. Ed was as frightened as we were and

subsequently we learned that he had had quite a difficult time to avoid getting the punishment planned for us. We drove away at a gallop and continued at that speed until our steed was so exhausted we had to stop. Then we bethought ourselves of our incriminating supplies, which we hastily tossed into a near-by stream, and as soon as our horse could proceed we started out at a smart pace directly for home, two hundred miles away.

It was the last of my irresponsible roving for some time, and though the last of the trip was filled with disappointment and grief for me, and had ended in an unpleasant and inglorious flight, there was one redeeming feature. My share of the profits formed the nest egg which made it possible for me to enroll as a student at the University of Michigan.

My adventuring during the past two years had been regarded at home as aimless and but a manifestation of the heedlessness of youth, but in fact it has proven to have had a very real value for

me. For a youngster of my age and condition I had seen a large part of the country and I had passed through unusual and enlivening experiences that gave me confidence in myself and a larger vision of what I might accomplish. Like my stone piles, they caused me to think and act for myself.

I had been brought in contact with people and had felt the pulse of life as it existed outside my own community. The last trip with the Infallible Blood Purifier had introduced me intimately to more men and women than I would otherwise have met in half a lifetime. With my own eyes I had seen many different American homes and had learned how other people lived. Poverty, sickness, despair, and tragedy, as well as wealth, happiness, and even luxury, had been paraded before me. I had become acquainted with "just folks"—and people as a whole have remained "just folks" to me ever since.

But, more important than all else, my youthful vagabondage had brought me into closer touch

with Nature, not only the wild and inaccessible places which I am generally credited with knowing so intimately, but the Nature which is all around us and available to everyone who reads this.

During the months I had spent under the open skies and along the winding roads, I had seen other aspects of Nature than those found in my later adventuring into distant wildernesses and my subsequent exploring where other men have seldom gone. For weeks on end I had slept out of doors, with the stars shining overhead. I had listened to the soft rustling of the breezes in the cornfields and made my bed, as dusk came on, in the sweet-smelling clover. I had learned to distinguish and love the myriad voices of the night and the unknown world which lies all about our man-made roofs and which had grown intimate and friendly with me. It has never lost its fascination.

The manifestations of Nature which I love most lie just beyond our own doors. The glad

things which grow under the smiling skies were intended from the beginning to be among the Creator's greatest gifts to man. If one is sick, either in body or soul, or both, Nature, the universal remedy, is at hand to soothe and to cure. There is no need to go into the trackless wilds, for this most priceless of all our heritage lies at our very gates.

CHAPTER VI

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

A health! Clink! Clink! And now we drink
No juice of grape or grain,
But we sip, forsooth, the wine of youth
That leaps from heart to brain.
We're young! We're young! Let every tongue
Intone the choral hymn,
While memory swings her silent wings
Above each beaded brim.

—F. N. SCOTT

FRED JANETTE'S mother was the first to suggest seriously that I ought to go to college; and she neglected no opportunity to urge that I plan for a course of study at Ann Arbor. As she read and criticized nearly everything I wrote while I was in school at Owosso, she frequently had chances to point out how I should set about the accomplishment of what at first seemed to me an almost impossible task. She nurtured the idea

so carefully that I eventually began to think that it was my own.

A large sum of money would be required, and also a diploma from the high school in Owosso. This last requirement sorely troubled me, for I realized that unless I materially mended my scholastic record I should never receive that coveted roll of paper with a red or a blue ribbon tied around it.

Mrs. Janette at length convinced me that I could not hope to reach the top rank among story writers without a university education, and about the time I fully realized this myself a part of the necessary cash was available. This was my share of the profits from sales of the Infallible Blood Purifier. Then I vigorously tackled the problem of finding the balance of the required funds.

I scraped mortar from the bricks which a contractor was salvaging from an old building he had recently razed. I split many cords of wood, beat the dust from hundreds of carpets, mowed lawns, shoveled astounding quantities of snow from side-

walks, and for a time had a job in Bentley's factory. Once I earned four dollars helping to fight a fire when enough grown men were not available.

I trapped muskrat and mink in season and obtained more than three hundred pelts. A prime muskrat skin, worth two or three dollars now, then brought about fifteen cents; and a mink skin which would now sell for ten or fifteen dollars was worth only about seventy-five cents or a dollar. I was up at early dawn and engaged in such work until the hour appointed for school or for my other money-making tasks, so that by the time I was ready to go to Ann Arbor I had amassed a total fortune of one hundred and twenty dollars. Included in this amount was the five dollars paid me by the editor of the *Gray Goose,* recounted in a previous chapter.

During the time I was in school I had read widely, and among other things had avidly pored over all available biographical studies of famous men, particularly great authors. In doing so I had

learned that many of the world's greatest men had not shown any signs in their youth of the possession of the qualities which later brought them their fame. I was particularly encouraged to learn that Sir Walter Scott had been regarded by his tutors as a hopeless dullard.

My own reputation for learning had been characterized by Mr. Chaffee, of the Central High School in Owosso, as "a most offensive dumbness." It was, therefore, not so very strange that my teachers smiled when I announced to them in the autumn of 1897 that I intended to enter the University of Michigan the following year—at least twelve months before I could possibly have graduated from High School, even had I been up in all my classes instead of so tragically far behind. Only my mother, possessed of infinite faith in my ability, believed that I would do as I planned. To others I was merely intoxicated with the wine of youth—or, to put it more plainly, most of them thought me a conceited fool and many said so most emphatically.

Professor Austin, who always rather liked me, was humorously frank. "How are you going to get into college, James, without a diploma—break in with a set of burglar's tools?" Professor Chaffee grinned. Whenever I made a blunder in class someone would be sure to whisper loudly, "He's going to college next year!" And as often as that happened in my English class, little Miss Needles, in spite of the fact that she was my friend, would be sure to giggle.

But Miss Boyce, whose loveliness always made my heart beat faster, steadfastly encouraged me, and even had me come to the home where she lived that we might study and plan together, without undue interruption, for the great undertaking ahead of me. It was from her that I first learned of the possibility of entering college by taking certain entrance examinations, even though I had no high-school diploma. What a tremendous prospect that information opened before me! From that moment I considered all obstacles removed. I was young! Young! No juice of grape

or grain could have enthused me more, and it was undoubtedly very fortunate for me that I did not —would not—consider the possibility that the university might not care to have me enroll there as a student until I had studied longer.

While other children in Central High's algebra-infested domain were learning by rote hundreds of rules and facts—a method of teaching which some day the directors of a more intelligent educational system will cast into oblivion—I struggled along with them in a faltering manner, but at the same time I was living in a world all my very own. In it there were new continents on which I built mighty empires, inhabited by people whom I invested with the qualities I most admired. I knew their fondest hopes and sympathized with their tragic disappointments. My make-believe people braved many hardships and perils, climbed unknown mountains, and ventured upon unexplored seas. I warmed their homes with love or destroyed them with hate, but always strove to make goodness, loyalty, and honor tri-

umphant in the end, according to my own convictions.

I hope no one will think that when I relate how much of my education was acquired elsewhere than in the classroom I unduly minimize the value of the opportunity which almost every boy and girl now has to acquire an education in the public schools, or in private and parochial institutions where similar studies are pursued. Our schools are as necessary to the welfare of humanity as the Church. They march hand in hand, and were either to go out of existence, civilization would suffer greatly, or, perchance, even come to an end. But every lad and lass should be taught that their lessons in school are merely means to an end and not the end itself. Their great purpose is to encourage young people to think, and the information which boys and girls incidentally acquire in school is but a by-product.

My mind was working, though not in accord with schoolroom routine. But it was working. That is the important thing. And as my mind

worked, so, I am sure, have the minds of untold thousands of other youths, only to be retarded by the ceaseless demand of parents that their children must bring home better grades on their report cards. It is easier during the high-school years, rather than any other period of most children's development, for fathers and mothers to stop the greatest of all educational processes—the process of thinking constructively. I have long treasured the belief that any boy or girl who is capable of thinking well is of tremendous importance in this world.

Another year of high school passed and vacation came. Ere long the summer months had gone and September, in the year 1898, arrived. There were no proud relatives nor gay young friends at the station to see me off to Ann Arbor. Almost all of my teachers and the majority of my acquaintances were confident that I would soon return—just as quickly as the entrance examinations at the university should prove what a failure I had been at school. I should not be putting it too

strongly to say that I slunk away, bearing my belongings in a huge receptacle then known as a "telescope" and accompanied by a box in the baggage car which contained my typewriter. How different that departure might have been if either my father or my mother had known that I was leaving the parental roof to be gone for more than ten years.

My arrival in Ann Arbor occurred several days before most of the other students reached the city, in conformance with a custom of mine to be on time or a little ahead of time—a custom which I have never abandoned. I checked my worldly possessions at the railway station and set out to find a room and board with an almost clear field to myself. Because of my limited finances I naturally sought for the cheapest accommodations available and that first day was successful in arranging for both.

It was my good fortune to be directed to a Mrs. Gray's boarding house on State Street, near the university campus, a place run exclusively for

college men of limited means, where at the end of each week the students paid their proportionate shares of the cost of the food and of the expense of preparing and serving it. The share of each person lucky enough to secure a place in this much-sought asylum for poverty-stricken young men was usually less than two dollars each seven days, as the items most frequently on the bill of fare were bread, potatoes, hash, and prunes. Just ahead of me on the list I saw the name of Walter Parker, then a farmer boy living near Corunna, but now the chief of staff for our splendid Memorial Hospital in Owosso and one of the most successful surgeons in the entire Middle West. Jim Greene, now Assistant Attorney General of Michigan, was the cash master who collected from the other students, for which service he was fed free of charge.

After this fortunate discovery of a place to eat regularly and cheaply, I found a room available to me for one dollar a week. It was in a very small and humble house without a furnace, and its

furnishings were limited to one chair, a small table, a lamp, and a bed. There was no rug or carpet on the floor, and the old lady in whose home this room was for rent frankly said she was too poor to make it more comfortable. Nevertheless, I was elated over my good luck, and after I had lugged my belongings over from the depot I went to a second-hand store where I got a piece of rag carpet for two dollars, a small stove for three dollars, and the necessary pipe for an additional dollar. The man who delivered these goods helped me set up the stove without any additional charge.

Then I was ready for the entrance examinations, to be written, as I was told, in the dread presence of one of the most learned professors at the university, who would very soon advise me of my fate.

The first of my examination days came and I found myself pondering over a long list of printed questions handed me by Professor Scott, who told me that I would be allowed two hours in

which to write my answers. Anxiously I read through the long list, and as I did so I began to feel a strange sensation of paralysis, mental and physical, creeping over me. I would have staked my life that none of my teachers in Owosso could have answered those questions—not even Superintendent Simmons or Professor Austin.

My academic grave seemed already dug. It yawned at my feet. One more step and I was surely gone. A vision of the long, bleak trail to Alaska, where the gold rush was at its height, flashed before me. Grimly I had made up my mind, while waiting for this ordeal, that if I failed to qualify in the special literary course which I had chosen, I would not return home to be laughed at or pitied. I would go out into the world, with the small capital I had, and make a name for myself somewhere. No one should ever be able to say, "I told you so."

Before my eyes there came pictures of the hundreds of new students, recent graduates from high school, who had followed me into Ann Arbor, and

I began to appreciate how great my folly had been. Had I owned a thousand times as much as I actually then possessed I would have gladly exchanged it all for a little roll of parchment proclaiming that I also had successfully completed my preparatory studies.

My face must have revealed to Professor Scott how sick of soul I had become, but that great man chose to pretend otherwise. There were only about a half dozen taking this particular examination and the others were all at work. Then, as if drawn by a magnet, my eyes met those of Professor Scott again. I tried to cover my confusion with a smile as he rose from his desk and came down among us. When he reached me he paused for a moment, laid his hand gently on my shoulder, and spoke in a low voice for me alone: "I am glad you are not starting out too hurriedly, James. You have plenty of time."

In those days of small classes at the University of Michigan the instructors knew their pupils by name and had a personal friendship for them.

Professor Scott's softly spoken words and the kindly pressure of his hand thrilled me. By calling my first name correctly he instilled great courage in me. Again I read the list over and then glanced quickly on either side. Pens were not going so rapidly as they had at first. A young woman near by was nibbling the end of her finger and there was a look of perplexity on her face. That gave me more courage.

Suddenly it dawned upon me that I possessed a great advantage over those others by reason of my extended experience in writing. The "story value" of that examination was taking hold of me, and though I frankly stated at the outset that I did not feel capable of answering many of the questions, I claimed the privilege of discussing them in my own way. I wrote twice as much as any one of the others, but answered directly and with a feeling of certainty only about half as many questions as were propounded. However, I discussed them all, and when I did not know the answer I would frankly say so,

without evasion or an attempt at guessing, and would then write half a page or so to say wherein lay its mystery to me. The fact that I had read hundreds of books of many kinds helped me immensely.

I took all my examinations in this manner and soon I was able triumphantly to send back to Owosso the news that I had been duly accepted as a student at the University of Michigan. Oh, the soul-satisfying thrill of that!

Then I plunged wholeheartedly into my college life, and, as you may guess, it was not my studies which most interested me. I became a part of that separate community, the student body, living in Ann Arbor, yet so entirely distinct from the permanent population of the little city. The plan of the university's first president when he had abolished student dormitories more than a half century before had utterly failed of realization. College men would not avail themselves of the opportunity he had thought so valuable to become members of the families re-

siding in Ann Arbor who would open their homes to the students. Those young men spoke a different language, wore different clothes, had different interests, and continued to be a people set apart as surely as those who live in the foreign sections which have grown up in our big cities. Soon I was one of them. I began to speak as they did, became intensely interested in the activities of my classmates—athletic, forensic, and social—and was soon wearing a grotesquely mutilated and adorned hat and clothes of the exaggerated style which my acquaintances prized so highly.

By some unknown good fortune I escaped most of the ordinary hazing which the sophomores then deemed themselves in honor bound to administer to all freshmen, though I recall that once I tearfully peeled many onions for "Elmer," to the intense delight of a group which had caught me on the campus after dark; that twice I hastily climbed the elm trees along the diagonal walk, to avoid the paddling being given me from below; and that once I was tossed into the "frog pond"

in the botanical garden then on the campus, after I had declined to give my high-school yell as fervently as my tormentors thought I should. I say it was my good luck to escape much of the "training" which the second-year students so freely bestowed, for certainly no other reason can be given. I was not of a retiring or humble disposition, nor was I at all diplomatic in my manner toward sophomores or in the methods I adopted as a self-appointed champion of the "inalienable rights" of the Class of 1902, and as a consequence I suffered one severe hazing. I have always been one to go vigorously into that which interests me and count the cost afterward. Such men make friends who stand with them whether Fortune smiles or frowns—and also implacable enemies. I have no "fair weather" friends, and those who do dislike me do so intensely.

My friends of college days were all quite willing to fight with me or for me whenever there was occasion for a combat, and a few of the

"Naughty Ones," as we called the sophomores that fall, took such real exceptions to my intolerant attitude toward them and established college traditions that I was chosen to carry the paste bucket for the party detailed to put up the challenges which the second-year men always posted in every prominent place available a few nights before "Black Friday." That was what we college men called the day preceding the night on which the annual "Fresh-Soph Rush" (a "riot" it would now be termed) was held around the flag pole in front of the Library.

On the Monday before that great clash between the two under classes a party of sophomores set upon me suddenly just after dark, as I was leaving Mrs. Gray's boarding house, and hustled me out to a barn not far from the corner of Hill Street and Forest Avenue, then on the very outskirts of Ann Arbor, where I found myself a prisoner already condemned to lug a big wooden bucket of white paste with which the sophomores planned to affix their luridly worded

defiances on telephone poles, walls, and other exposed places near the campus after midnight. The back-breaking task assigned to me lasted for nearly three hours without a fair chance of escape being presented. Then my outer garments were removed and I was liberally covered with the paste which remained, rolled in fallen leaves, and chased off toward my rooming place with a hearty application of wooden paddles which the foresighted youths had provided.

Such was my introduction to college life at the University of Michigan. I am informed that the happenings I have just related could not occur there now. Some of us, looking back twenty years or more, wonder at times whether the new order of closely supervised under-class rivalry is an improvement.

After paying my college fees and buying my books I became painfully aware that my money would last a much shorter time than I had anticipated. So I undertook the care of two furnaces half a mile apart during the late fall and

winter months. My pay was to be a dollar and a half apiece each week, and thus my continued stay at Ann Arbor was assured.

My record in the quiz sections to which I had been assigned was not particularly brilliant, but in those days students specially enrolled, and to a large extent those enrolled as candidates for degrees, were permitted to choose which courses they would take, and because I selected what interested me, my attendance at lectures was good and I somehow managed to "pass" at the final examinations.

It seems hardly necessary to record that none of the Greek-letter fraternities sought me as a member. When I was in Ann Arbor few save the scions of wealthy parents and those accustomed to a life far different from mine had been were able to "make" a fraternity, unless possessed of great athletic prowess, chosen to some place of campus honor, or renowned for scholarly attainments. I was an "Independent," as the non-fraternity men were called then, and we con-

stituted a great majority of the student population.

One day Professor Scott, to whom I had related rather fully my past experiences, told me that he believed there was an excellent opportunity for me in Ann Arbor at newspaper work, where many correspondents and special writers were thus sustaining themselves in college. He commented very favorably on my entrance-examination papers and on my work in the classes with which he was particularly familiar. He fired me with such enthusiasm that I forthwith arranged for another lad to take over my furnaces and again I wholeheartedly began to write. Though the situation at times looked so hopeless that I would have been glad once more to care for a couple of furnaces, I persevered and was eventually able to meet all my necessary expenses by writing special feature stories, which I sold to various newspapers in Detroit and other cities. In some months I received as high as seventy-five dollars, though my average earnings were much

less. All my other college activities were dropped. My studies and my writing took all my time and thought.

During these months I strayed farther away from Nature than for many years before, but I did not entirely abandon my practice of close communion with it. Frequently I took long tramps alone over the rolling countryside, going as far to the north as Whittemore Lake, westwardly to Chelsea, south to Milan and Saline, and eastwardly to Wayne and Belleville. Every patch of woods, stream, and byway in that territory I knew as well as I did those of the countryside around Owosso. One of my favorite strolls was to the hilltops north and east of Old Town, that part of Ann Arbor near the Michigan Central depot. From those heights I could see the campus buildings nestling among the trees, and the quiet, peaceful little city spread out in a beautiful panorama that never failed to thrill and inspire me. On many a winter night, when all the world was asleep, I stood over there watching the

twinkling lights and listening to the chimes in the library tower. In the spring, before the ice was all out of the Huron River, I had paddled my canoe upstream, even as far as Delhi Mills, and enjoyed the thrill of shooting the rapids at the old Ann Arbor waterworks. These excursions were at once my recreation and my means of devotion.

My freshman year at Ann Arbor came to an end all too soon, though as June approached I began to anticipate most pleasurably my return to Owosso and the triumph I would have over the doubting Thomases who had been so certain I would experience an inglorious defeat at the university. However, I did not go back that summer. Fate again intervened. Professor Adams had undertaken a huge railway statistical work for the government and I was one of those chosen from the student body to help him. We were paid seventy-five dollars a month, and when the university opened in the fall of 1899 I returned

with sufficient ready cash to give myself luxuries which I had never known before.

Upon my arrival at Ann Arbor as a sophomore I again chose to take my meals at Mrs. Gray's boarding house, but I selected a two-room apartment on Jefferson Street for my residence. Then, for the first time in my life, I had a good tailor make me a fine suit of clothes and also a pair of knickers, which were at that time very much in vogue among the students. At his suggestion I obtained a pair of false calves for my skinny legs, over which my long stockings fitted very nicely. I had previously acquired a mandolin and a pipe, and thus was fairly on the way to become such a "college man" as the periodicals devoted to humor so frequently portray.

As a sophomore I devoted only a little attention to the incoming freshmen. The enthusiasm with which I had entered into under-class rivalries the preceding autumn had worn itself out, or, rather, had been supplanted by my interest in newspaper work. This fall I strolled about the

campus, graciously tolerant of the queer people who had now chosen to attend the university and quite unable to see that they were much like those with whom I had first enrolled as a student. I enjoyed the thrill of meeting friends from whom I had parted months before and got a real satisfaction out of seeing again the old familiar buildings in and out of which my companions were hustling like ants from their hills. I was quite at peace with all the world, fully satisfied with the new life I saw just ahead, and inclined to see the campus and its people with the eyes of a friendly disinterested observer. Without realizing it, I was looking for "news" and suitable material for the special feature stories which I would write during the ensuing months.

My second year at Ann Arbor came and went much as the preceding twelvemonth, but with one important exception. Now I began to take a keen interest in the young women. Up to that time I had known in a general way that there were such creatures about me, that many of them were

very beautiful, and that they were an important part of the student body. But I had felt no more personal need for an intimate friendship with any of them than I had felt a need for close association with the girls I knew in Owosso.

Without realizing it fully, my intense application to the activities which interested me had kept me for years with nerves at a tension. At times I had come almost to the snapping point, like a piece of rubber stretched to its limit for too long a period. But life had become easier, and now and then there was an opportunity to pause and consider. Then I began to understand that no matter how successful a man may be, how much money he may amass, or how many honors he may acquire, his life is woefully incomplete unless a woman fully shares it with him. As the tired-eyed factor at Fond du Lac once said, while he stood beside the lonely grave under a huge spruce: "No country is God's country without a woman."

One afternoon early in the fall I strolled down

a byway that clung to the edge of the Huron River on its way out of Ann Arbor. I was alone as far as I knew and was glad of it. Only a few people ever took this half-hidden trail. I loved the bigness and the glory of the solitude. A slight haze hung on the far horizon, but the infinite, tender sky above was unmarred by a single cloud. In all directions, as far as my eyes could see, the rolling countryside spread out like a great painting, and the warm sunshine made the turning maples great splashes of red and gold against a background of green. There was no sign of the bare boughs, brown fields, and drifting leaves which another fortnight would bring.

A mile or so down this little-used road a murmuring spring-fed stream came out from the bushes which concealed the entrance to a narrow gorge, known to the initiated as "Schoolgirl Glen," the existence of which I believe was quite unsuspected by more than ninety per cent. of the students. It was, however, one of my favored resorts, and sometimes as I entered it from the

trail I followed on this day I could fancy myself looking down the aisle of a great cathedral where a concealed organist let his fingers softly wander over the keys.

I turned off the trail, now a well-worked automobile drive, and wandered slowly up the glen. Halfway to its head a narrow path, so seldom used as to be almost indiscernible, twisted drunkenly up the steep eastern hillside to a cleared grassy spot some twenty feet wide where I often sat and dreamed for hours. No one ever came to disturb my reveries. I had learned to regard it as my own.

But on this occasion, as I scrambled around the last bend in the ascending path, I suddenly became aware that I had a companion. Within ten feet from where I stood there sat a young woman whom I discovered to be very lovely, gazing off across the hills and valleys and quite unconscious that she was not alone. Like a carven stone I stood, staring, for I know not how long, until she slowly turned her head toward me. Her lips

were parted in a little smile as she said, "Hello! I had thought this *my* retreat, and I cannot recall having invited anyone to share it with me." In her look was neither boldness nor suspicion, and her clear, deep eyes forbade familiarity or pretense. Her voice aroused me, and as she realized my embarrassment she swept her arm out over the autumn-tinted panorama around us and said, "Won't you sit down? Don't you think it is beautiful and inspiring? I love it."

Suddenly my wandering wits returned and I managed to stammer an apology for my intrusion, thinking for the moment that she must be the daughter of the owner of this land. I was sure that had she been a common trespasser like myself, with only a deep appreciation and love for the beauty and splendor of the view to be enjoyed from this vantage point, she could hardly have appeared so unconcerned.

Our unexpected meeting that autumn afternoon ripened rapidly into close friendship. After a whirlwind courtship we were married the follow-

ing January, and she became the mother of my daughters, Carlotta and Viola.

Although my newspaper work took most of my time not required for my studies, I did not entirely cease writing stories. In fact, there were always several on the way to or from the editors of various magazines, and now the *Gray Goose* frequently accepted the material I submitted.

During the summer of 1900 I was out in the open again, mostly in my beloved Big Marshes. In September, however, I returned to Ann Arbor as a member of the Junior Class, but I did not remain the entire college year, for one day there came a telegram from Pat Baker, undoubtedly the greatest newspaper editor who had ever lived in Michigan. The memory of that big, gruff Irishman is still fresh in the minds of many. Before his retirement he was a giant in his profession, as greatly feared by his enemies as he was loved and respected by his friends.

I had seen him twice in the office of the Detroit *News,* but was still rather dubious about his atti-

tude toward me. I hadn't quite gotten over my first impression that he was an ogre who would gleefully have cut my head off had there been no law against it? But, like other young men lured on by the fascination of writing for his newspapers, I admired him greatly and had even considered asking him humbly for a position.

Now, of his own volition, he had telegraphed an offer of such a job to me! It was a most important event in my young manhood. My cup of joy was running over. Pat Baker actually wanted me on his newspaper! No thought of declining entered my mind, nor did it occur to me to inquire what he proposed to pay for my services. The great man had offered me a place among his reporters—and nothing else mattered one little bit. Forthwith, I resigned from the university and departed, bag and baggage, for Detroit.

It has been said that whom the gods would destroy they first make mad. And mad, indeed, I must have been so to alter the entire course of

my life without thought of the future, after having given hostages to Fortune. It is also true that Fate, with much that is hidden but very worthwhile in store, often makes the chosen person mad, lest on thoughtful consideration of what is known he shall lack the requisite courage.

CHAPTER VII

MY NEWSPAPER CAREER

Some men are down because they were unnerved,
And some are up because they kept their pluck,
Some men are down because they chose to shirk,
Some men are high because they did their work.

—EDGAR A. GUEST

WHEN Professor Scott made the suggestion that I should engage in newspaper work as a means of paying my expenses at Ann Arbor, my first move was to select the names of fifty editors from a newspaper directory and offer my services to each one of these great men. Few replied at all, and such answers as I did get were not encouraging. All the papers that used special news or features from the university already had ex-

perienced correspondents in Ann Arbor. However, I immediately began to write campus stories and to send them off to editors in Detroit, Chicago, and New York. Each of them received two or three a week, for I made enough copies of everything I wrote so that no one would escape my contributions. Like a drop of water wearing away a stone, I undertook to remove what appeared to me a most heartless lack of interest and appreciation on the part of these gentlemen. I spent for postage, with some trepidation, my second five-dollar check from the *Gray Goose,* which was sent for my story "Yasodhara of the Luni."

Finally George Snow, who was then editor of the Sunday edition of the Detroit *News-Tribune,* wrote me: "The stuff you are sending has all been written a thousand times. Send something new—something snappy." The same mail which brought this criticism and advice also brought me a ten-dollar remittance from the *Gray Goose* for another story, and my spirits rose. Many defeated

men have eventually become victors because they have clung tenaciously to a preconceived plan and have refused to admit themselves vanquished.

I asked the correspondent of the Detroit *Free Press* what George Snow meant by his request for "something snappy." He meditated for a moment and then said:

"Well, if you can find a prof's daughter who is secretly married to the student who tends her father's furnace, or a man murdered in some mysterious manner and without any apparent motive, or some poor cuss who is heir to a fortune but doesn't know it—all that is 'snappy' enough. Don't fake it, though! If you do, you're a dead hope."

So that was it! Editors wanted something unusual from their special writers. I began to prowl about like a hound hunting for a scent, and accidentally learned that the wife of a farmer living about ten miles away claimed to be descended from one of the titled families in Europe. In those days most Americans were rather prone to

make humble obeisance to anything that smacked of "high life" over the seas, and, realizing this, I soon found the place and the people. I returned to my typewriter with both facts and photographs. There wasn't much to the story, except that the woman was fairly certain that she was distantly related to an obscure nobleman in England and I had found her working with her husband at the woodpile, handling one end of a crosscut saw. I flatter myself that I made a good job of it. From the library I secured material which gave me vivid pictures of domestic life in palaces and castles and of great affairs at court. In the midst of all this aristocratic glamor I put the hard-handed, impoverished farmer woman. Ninety per cent. of my story was composed of colorful descriptions of what might have been had her grandparents' ancestors never come to America. George Snow printed it. This was my introduction to newspaper work, and very soon I began to get assignments from the *News-Tribune*.

One day a man was arrested in Detroit for

cruelty to animals because, being a Christian Scientist, he had attempted to heal the broken leg of his horse in accord with what he conceived to be the tenets of that group. George Snow sent me the clipping and directed me to secure the opinions of a number of university professors.

I began with President Angell, who talked to me in the fatherly way that so greatly endeared "Prexy" to many generations of students and made it impossible for any other president of the University of Michigan to be known by that nickname, though the Grand Old Man of Michigan has been gone many years. But he assured me there were others much better qualified than himself to talk on the subject. Nearly all whom I approached also declined, but I kept at my task so persistently that eventually three did give me views which I was authorized to quote. I tried particularly hard to get something from my French instructor, Mr. Effinger, now Dean of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, but he declared that he was such a recent arrival and

so unimportant in the teaching organization that it would be in poor taste for him to join in the proposed symposium.

George Snow gave two full pages in the next Sunday *News-Tribune* to what I sent in, not a line written by myself, paid for at regular space rates, and from that day my offerings were accepted with great regularity. I also wrote for the Chicago *Tribune* and the New York *Herald*. My place as a newspaper writer was established, and, as I have already told you, I maintained myself in college in that way until that most important event in my young manhood transpired—the telegram from Pat Baker offering me a place as a reporter.

As soon as I reached Detroit I presented myself to Ed Beck, the city editor, who told me to get acquainted and sent me out only on funerals. He kept me at them until I learned not to make romantic features of such events. Then he sent me to report a fire which had burned a laundry on Grand River Avenue, the biggest conflagration

I had ever seen, but quite an ordinary one for Detroit, then a city of about three hundred thousand, among whom I was probably the greenest and most unsophisticated, despite the exaggerated ideas of my own accomplishments which I had acquired in Ann Arbor. I wrote up that fire with an enthusiasm which would have been a credit to Moses in reporting his discovery of the Ten Commandments. Ed Beck cut my column and a half to three short paragraphs, but said I had done well.

A word of commendation was peculiarly heartening to me then, for the ruthless slashing of my copy which had already occurred was beginning to make me wonder whether the eight dollars in my pay envelope each Saturday (accepted at first with a smile to hide my dismay and later with a grim determination soon to force better recognition) was the true measure of my ability as a reporter after all. I was particularly downcast that day, for my idol, Pat Baker, had just called me into his office and told me brutally that if I

wanted to stay on the *News* I must at once get my hair cut.

Not a word had he said about my work. There was no recognition whatever of the great efforts I was making to justify his choosing me as a reporter. Just a peremptory command to visit a barber—then instantly his mind was engrossed in something else and I was forgotten. It is in the plan of the Creator, I have learned, that unless we taste the bitter we cannot appreciate the sweet, that we must experience sorrow in order to know the meaning of joy, and that without the power to hate we could not understand the significance of love. The period during which I was a reporter for the Detroit *News* was rich in experiences calculated to teach me to taste the bitter without a grimace. It hardened me for the fight for existence, through which I have learned to come a little nearer to the ultimate truths of life and to appreciate the immortal melody of it.

Each week the editor of the Sunday edition asked me to write some kind of feature story for

him, and the satisfaction those tasks gave me was my salvation. I *could* write feature stuff, in which my imagination was given considerable latitude. Incidentally, the extra pay thus obtained made it possible for me to support myself and family.

One day I was sent with "Kiltie" Stewart to report the hanging of a murderer at Sandwich in Canada, just across the Detroit River. I almost fainted away when the trap was sprung. Only about twenty lines of what I wrote was used, but the description of the interesting event written by "Kiltie" ran on by the column. I was pursued by the horrible fear that perhaps I was scarcely worth eight cents a week, rather than the eight dollars I was receiving. I began to sneak up to the cashier's window for my pay envelope, and like a scared rabbit kept out of sight of Pat Baker.

Then came the big event for which I had long waited—an opportunity to do something which would make me famous in a single hour. To-day the word "scoop" is almost forgotten about the

offices of great metropolitan dailies, lost in the standardization of the work and the methodical routine with which news is gathered. But when I was a struggling young reporter on the Detroit *News,* a quarter of a century ago, even a three-line scoop was an event of consequence which meant much to the reporter who scored it. No sooner was the first edition of our evening rival on the street than our editors would go over it with bated breath to learn wherein we had beaten them, or been beaten. Woe was in store for a reporter, whether on an assignment or on a "regular beat," who allowed his rival to get the best of him, for to be "scooped" only a few times meant the hunting of a new job, something then rather hard to find. On the other hand, the highest commendation from our chiefs was the reward of the reporter who got a good scoop—and this often took the form of a fatter pay envelope. Naturally, I was always alert, and when I saw my chance, like Cæsar, I took it.

I had been sent to watch and wait around police

headquarters, and as I was going up the steps I met a rooming-house proprietor who told me that out on Gratiot Avenue two young married women had discovered that a "Peeping Tom" was spying upon them. Instead of referring the matter to their husbands, they had lured the culprit to the home of one of them and there they had soundly thrashed him with long "black-snake" whips. This story presented amazing possibilities, I thought, and if it were true I would be sure of as much space as we ordinarily gave to a murder. In those days Detroit did not have two or three killings and a half-dozen hold-ups each night. The picturesque detail and the commendable courage of the ladies made me anticipate a marvelous scoop and sent me off to the scent as fast as I could go.

Not only was the story true, I found, but the women, still heated with their exertions, were quite willing to talk. No street car ever moved as slowly as the one which bore me to the office of the *News* with my precious facts. It was almost

time for the paper to go to press, and I still experience a thrill when I recall how Ed Beck snatched the sheets out of my machine and rushed them to the typesetting machines. What a story! The whole staff room knew about it. I felt that my place was now firmly established.

It was given a place on the front page and a tall, middle-aged man from New York, Annesley Burrowes, who had recently joined us, a man of great experience, upon whom we looked with a feeling akin to awe, said to me, "That's a great story." Then I was sure I must have hit the bull's eye squarely.

But early the next morning there was a most unusual conference of editors in Pat Baker's office, and in a few moments I was ready to start the hunt for a new job. The unanimous opinion in the reporters' room was that my instant dismissal was entirely justified. I had gotten the culprit's first name wrong and made it appear that a highly respected citizen had been horsewhipped.

Soon I knew how hard it was to find a job in Detroit in those days. For weeks I haunted the streets in search of work, but I would not acknowledge myself beaten. Though tempted many times to return to Owosso or to Ann Arbor in these very dark days, I grimly held myself to the city. Again I resumed my story writing, and it was an encouragement and inspiration to me, as it has been all through my life. After a day of fruitless searching for a job I was soothed and comforted when I sat down to my typewriter at night. Still, I sold only a few of the stories I wrote, and as the months passed I began to look rather shabby.

One day, however, I chanced into the presence of Alfred Russell, long since dead, but then one of Michigan's greatest lawyers—a man who has left behind him a record of charitable acts and deeds of kindness which will be green in memory for years after his professional genius has been forgotten. In his private office this great-hearted man spent an hour with me, counseling me as he

would have advised an only son. Then he gave me a letter to Harry Stillman, at the huge pharmaceutical manufacturing plant of Parke Davis & Co., out Jefferson Avenue. There I was given a job at fifty dollars a month and was actually made to feel that I had conferred a favor on that institution by accepting it, though I am now quite certain that they did not need me at all.

For six weeks, in order that I might understand my new job, I labored in the manufacturing part of the business. I stirred a tasty-smelling hair tonic brewing in huge vats until its exhilarating fumes nearly overcame me and I barely escaped falling into a tank. My next experience was with cod liver oil, and after that I buzzed up sandalwood from which santal oil was distilled. Then I spent many odoriferous days where pepsin was prepared from pigs' stomachs, and yearned to go back to the big paddle and the hair-tonic vats. Next I made pills of all shapes, sizes, and colors, in a branch of the factory that put out more than one hundred and fifty tons of them each month.

What a nation of pill eaters we Americans are!

But eventually I was installed at a desk in the publicity and correspondence department, where I read medical and pharmaceutical journals, selecting those things which seemed likely to interest the various departments and seeing that my selections were properly routed through the establishment to those most concerned with them. The work was interesting, and if one were not too intent on reporting "the whole truth and nothing but the truth" it was fair to call it an editorial position. Such a statement appeared in the Owosso paper, and I was conscious of feeling much more self-respecting than I had for a long time past. Many times had I fancied I could hear my acquaintances back in Owosso saying: "Jimmy Curwood? No, he isn't in college. Nor is he writing stories or doing newspaper work. He's making pills in Detroit." I seemed about as far from the goal I had set out to reach as the adverse winds of Fate could possibly have carried me. My early dreams, my ambitions, my love of Nature, my

university career, my story writing—everything I had ever hoped or planned for—seemed ended here in the prosaic task of making and distributing pills. Just a trifle more than seventeen hundred different kinds of pills were then being made by Parke Davis & Co., but we were cheerfully ready to invent others, if the customer could not be pleased with the variety offered.

While in the department which made pepsin, I had become acquainted with a poverty-stricken Belgian of aristocratic appearance who later became very well known in Detroit. Now Van de Noot claimed to be a baron, and in those days it was an item of news value to discover such a person at work. So I spent one evening writing up his story and sent it, with his picture, to the editor of the Sunday edition of the *News-Tribune*. To my delight the story was accepted, and I received a check for eight dollars for it, as much as I had received for a whole week as a reporter on the *News*. Van der Noot was as pleased as I, for the newspaper story added greatly to his im-

portance in the large Belgian colony in the city. One Sunday soon afterward he introduced me to its important people and I saw at once that "inside the lines" I might readily obtain many little features of Belgian life and customs which the Sunday papers would be glad to use. This proved to be the case, and in many instances my name was used with my contributions, which were accepted by the former New York *World* man, Annesley Burrowes, at that time Sunday editor of the *News-Tribune,* who had complimented me on my whipping story.

Then came that unforgettable tenth day of May, 1902, when I was offered a job as a special writer on the Sunday *News-Tribune* at eighteen dollars a week, more than twice what I had received as a reporter on the Detroit *News*. Harry Stillman and Mr. Woodruff, my immediate superior at the factory, seemed happy at the change in my fortune and sent me off with a handshake and a Godspeed. For five years thereafter I kept a desk on the second floor of the old *News*

building on Shelby Street, the scene of my joys and my sorrows, my tears and my smiles, in the road I was determined to follow.

I fell to the job as a glove fits the hand. My task of writing Sunday features, part fact but more fiction, was really not a task at all, but rather a labor of love. Under the supervision and tutelage of Annesley Burrowes, the finest master I could have had, I was soon joyously turning out one- and two-page features that increased my enthusiasm and love for magazine writing tenfold. I worked seven days a week and frequently long into the nights.

Within two years my salary was increased to twenty-five dollars a week, something to be proud of then; and I was also placing sketches and articles in newspapers and other periodicals calculated to induce settlers to go into the far western parts of Canada. Then *Munsey's Magazine* accepted my story of Lake Michigan, "The Captain of the *Christopher Duggan*," and paid me so handsomely—seventy-five dollars—that I was

on the point of resigning and devoting myself to literary work entirely. Only the very earnest efforts of Mr. Burrowes and another increase in my salary—to twenty-eight dollars a week—saved me from that disaster.

Mr. Burrowes had for a long time been having trouble with his eyes, and at last his affliction became so serious that he was compelled to resign, never again to do newspaper work. Thus passed from the profession one of the finest of craftsmen, an honorable gentleman and an untiring scholar—a man who never lacked the time patiently to help those trying to follow in his footsteps. Then I was given his place, at a salary of thirty dollars a week, but I am now sure that I only partly filled the position.

During these years as a special feature writer and editor for the Sunday *News-Tribune* of Detroit I did what now appears to me to have been an almost unbelievable amount of other work. I edited a bankers' publication called *Dollars and Sense,* did publicity work for the Paint

Manufacturers' Association of America, and turned out at least one magazine article or story every two weeks. Not long after *Munsey's Magazine* had accepted that first story of mine to appear in a periodical which had a national circulation, *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* accepted "Pills," and subsequently a prediction made by its editor years before came true and *Leslie's* published more than a dozen articles and stories which I had written. Later *Munsey's* took another story, and *The American Boy* accepted my first juvenile serial to be printed in a periodical widely distributed.

In the year 1905 I took a short vacation and passed it entirely in the wilderness. The material I obtained was the basis of an article published in *Outing*. Then *Outlook* and the *Woman's Home Companian* accepted contributions from me. Toward the end of that year I was successful in placing an article in the *Cosmopolitan,* and consequently sold its editor many stories of fiction.

Soon Hewitt Hanson Howland, editor of the

magazine published by the Bobbs-Merrill Company at Indianapolis, asked for a series on the Great Lakes and the ships which plowed them, and about this time I began contributing to *Leslie's Weekly,* mostly Nature sketches and storiettes, which eventually numbered more than one hundred.

So the year 1906 and part of the following year passed, and then I plunged into the additional task of writing two books at the same time —a juvenile story of the Hudson Bay country which I called *The Wolf Hunters,* and a tale of the Mormon settlements on Beaver Island in Lake Michigan, entitled *The Courage of Captain Plum.* It is a wonder that I did not entirely wreck my health. My nerves were at a great tension all of the time.

The tireless energy with which I had plunged into my work since my departure from Ann Arbor, and my habitual devotion of long hours to its accomplishment, left me little time for my home. From the very nature of my work I was

alone much of the time, and even when with my family my thoughts were often far away. Like many others, I had come to think of home as something which simply happened, a place where I might eat, sleep when absolutely necessary, and work again at those tasks not readily capable of being done at the office. I didn't realize that the young woman who kept it for me was being excluded from my real life, did not share with me the thrills incident to my battle for success in my profession, and was gradually beginning to inquire of herself whether the long struggle, with poverty at first, and later with that peculiarly excruciating sense of lonesomeness one feels in constant contact with strangers, was worth the effort after all. Perhaps there were warnings of the inevitable result—divorce—which, if heeded in time, might have avoided the wreck that occurred in 1908. However, surmises concerning what possibly might have happened, but did not, are profitless. As we grow older we all learn it is better to let the dead past bury its dead in peace.

I had previously sent off to Indianapolis my manuscripts of *The Wolf Hunters* and *The Courage of Captain Plum*. Weeks passed, during which I waited with trepidation and prayerful hope, meanwhile continuing my newspaper work. Then came a letter telling me that both had been accepted, and assuring me that *The Courage of Captain Plum* was liked so well that Bobbs-Merrill Company had decided to offer me a contract, providing that I would write and they would publish a book of similar length once each twelve months for the next five years—books to sell at one dollar and a half a copy and for which I should receive a royalty of ten per cent.

The checks which I had been getting for my fiction stories from various magazines, ranging from twenty-five to fifty dollars, and even the two cents a word which I had been receiving from the *Cosmopolitan,* fell in my mind to the status of mere pittances. I determined to be very conservative and so calculated my royalties on but one hundred thousand copies of each book. Verily,

I was now on the verge of attaining great wealth! The Bobbs-Merrill Company was publishing many of the biggest sellers in those days. Once in a while I get out the royalty reports for those very first books of mine. Even after all these years have passed, the effect of comparing what I fancied would happen with what actually did occur is much like the feeling one gets on suddenly stepping under a cold shower.

I induced three or four newspapers to print the story of my phenomenal success, and the finest article was in the Detroit *News-Tribune.* My folks at home were forthwith assured that they need no longer worry and that Dad could get rid of his cobbling shop, which he did very soon afterward.

The wonderful hour had come when I could hand in my resignation and retire from newspaper work, and this I did as soon as possible. There was no thought in my mind that anything but sunshine lay ahead.

Then I wrote to my brother, who was still

down in Ohio, that I was about to go on a long wilderness trip and would pay all his expenses if he would accompany me. By this time I had become so well known to the Canadian Pacific and the Grand Trunk that free transportation was easily obtained. Ed and I had one of the most wonderful adventures of our lives, up in the country around Hudson Bay.

CHAPTER VIII

GOD'S COUNTRY AT LAST

Do you fear the force of the wind,
The slash of the rain?
Go face them and fight them,
Be savage again.
Go hungry and cold like the wolf,
Go wade like the crane.
The palms of your hands will thicken,
The skin of your cheeks will tan,
You'll grow ragged and weary and swarthy
But you'll walk like a man.

—HAMLIN GARLAND

DURING the year 1902, in which I returned to the *News,* I became acquainted with M. V. MacInness, "Mac" to all his friends, then representing the Canadian Immigration Department in Detroit, with offices on Jefferson Avenue. I shall long cherish the memory of his kindly interest in my affairs. To him I went frequently when in need of counsel, entertainment, or merely relaxation.

He was rather portly and always in jovial humor. He never tired of painting vivid word pictures for me of his beloved Canada, more particularly the vast panorama of unexplored wilderness toward the north and west. His mind was filled with information concerning that magnificent expanse of territory and he never lost an opportunity to introduce me to important Canadians who came to his office. I met many Dominion immigration officers, members of Parliament, Hudson's Bay Company officials, officers of the Grand Trunk and Canadian Pacific, members of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, and scores of others whose interests were in the vast areas of the Canadian Northland.

My visits with him afforded the only opportunity I had in those hard years to let my native love for God's great out-of-doors grow as it would. The love of Nature, developed in my boyhood along the Shiawassee—my river—had become the cornerstone of my life. I knew what superstructure I wanted to erect, but as the

months passed swiftly by it began to appear that I would be a long time banished from the Happy Valley of my desires. Mac kept me true to my faith and was eventually the one to remove the obstacles which blocked my way.

During the time I worked as a special writer and editor for the *News* I acquired great self-confidence, and dear old Mac dreamed splendidly for me. Repeatedly he assured me that soon the Dominion authorities and the Canadian railroads would avail themselves of my ability to depict the grandeur of the great open spaces to the north and west where they desired people to settle. Eventually my great handicap in their eyes, the fact that I was born in the United States, was overcome and I went away to the land where I was eagerly to look forward to each dawn and greatly to regret each setting sun.

About the time when *The Courage of Captain Plum* was first offered for sale in the book stores the Canadian government made me an offer of eighteen hundred dollars a year, plus all expenses,

to explore the picturesque prairie provinces of the West and then go up into the North to gather material for articles and stories intended to induce settlers into that country. The opportunity to become a part of the great and glorious land whose far frontiers had been a part of my dreams for years thrilled me as no other event in my life. I can remember as clearly as if it were yesterday when Mac showed me the official papers and told me of my great good fortune. He congratulated me as earnestly as he had previously inspired me to hope. I shall never forget his enthusiasm. There has been an empty place in my heart since he died, and whenever I go up into that great Northland I know Mac's spirit is there, for it was God's Country to him just as surely as it always will be to me.

The vast wilderness of the Peace River country, the mountains to the westward, the great reaches of the Athabasca and the Mackenzie, the solitary arctic plains, and the uninhabited forests about Hudson Bay became the ruling passion of my life,

which I determined to put into my books so deathlessly that for many years to come all might read them and learn to love the scenes where my heroes and heroines lived.

My first trips on this new task were short ones, and then events so shaped themselves that I established my home again in Owosso, a little more than ten years after I had left it to enter the University of Michigan. Shortly after my return Lou Allison took me as his guest to a chicken-pie supper at the Congregational Church, where he introduced me to a group of young teachers, among whom was Ethel Greenwood, whom I slightly remembered as having been a school girl in a class two or three years behind mine. Her bright eyes at once made a great impression on me. She had been reading of my expeditions into the North and was so genuinely interested in them that I decided I should become better acquainted with her. I began to think that she would be a wonderful comrade on the hundred wild trails and hidden byways which I had planned

to travel. After a short courtship we were married in the old home on John Street at six o'clock one morning, and by seven were on a train bound for the wilderness. Through all that beautiful autumn, the long winter that followed, and the next lovely spring we spent our honeymoon in a log cabin deep within the heart of the great forest near Hudson Bay. During this time I wrote *Philip Steele of the Royal Mounted.*

I had found a wife who was proud of the work by which I earned my living, who looked fearlessly into the future with me, splendidly caring for my little daughters; a mother who later gave me my son, James, the last blessing to our family, now almost ready to go to college.

The years which followed hard upon our unusual honeymoon have passed rapidly—a great part of the time being spent out of doors, living with the people and wild life I have put into my books. For months at a time we would bury ourselves in the wilderness, hundreds of miles away from civilization, and when we would leave the

shack we had built it was departing from a beloved home. The dreams of adventure in which Skinny and I indulged so many years ago have come true—for me. My feet have trod many little-known trails through the Northland. In all seasons I have lived under the open skies in tents, shacks, cabins, and even in igloos. Over the boundless prairies, into the farthest mountains, upon the great Northern plains, through arctic snows, and along distant waterways, I have enjoyed more than my share of the things I dreamed about in boyhood. Yet my heart yearns for the same adventures over again and I slowly count the weeks that must elapse before I set out once more for the wilderness.

CHAPTER IX

ADVICE TO AUTHORS

True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
As those move easiest who have learned to dance.
'Tis not enough no harshness gives offense—
The sound must seem an echo of the sense.

—ALEXANDER POPE

SOME time has elapsed since I last wrote of the events in my own life that I thought worthy of a place in my autobiography. I am again in my cabin of logs in northern Michigan, where my friends convinced me that this narrative should be written. Now the air I breathe contains no perfume of pine, no odor of balsam nor scent of fragrant cedar. No incense rises out of the valleys, and the trailing arbutus I then gathered from sunny knoll-sides is but a pleasant memory.

The green-and-black forest remains, but it is bound and smothered in the snow. A terrific blizzard, howling out of the north these last two days, has obliterated every sign of the few trails and roads that in gentler months invite occasional wanderers into our many square miles of green timber. This storm has been almost frightening at times. Forty-eight hours of it! Forty-eight hours, during any half dozen of which the hardiest man without fire and shelter would have perished.

Last night the wind roared around my isolated studio like a tornado. A thousand moaning voices wailed out in the darkness. In echelon hard upon echelon, writhing storm clouds, dark and mysterious, scudded low over the spires and towers of the far-reaching wilderness, like the waves of a mighty army driven on to conquer or destroy by the irresistible will of a supreme commander. As they passed over my snug little studio, so far away from all mankind, ceaseless volleys of frozen snow clicked like particles of granite

against my windows, through which the light from within my cabin struggled vainly to pierce the sable curtain hung so close around me.

This morning the storm passed on and the sky was clear. The rising winter sun was brilliantly cresting the tree tops when I crawled out of bed to stir the embers of my dying fire. Frost lay thick upon the window panes, ornamented and stained like old cathedral glass. I could hear the snap and crack of the intense cold in the trees outside and in the timbers of my cabin walls. On its wind-sheltered side the thermometer gradually rose until it reached twenty degrees below zero by noon.

After breakfast I went out into the forest which seemed so silent and lifeless, like an untenanted cavern. Reason told me that no living thing could have carried on through these forty-eight hours of blizzard—that such courage and tenacity of purpose could not possibly be a part of any creature of flesh and blood—but my own experience as well as that of other Free Com-

panions who have followed the wilderness trails in the North assured me that reason had erred and had considered too much the ease with which man himself succumbs. There *was* life! Deer went struggling belly-deep through the white and drifted footing, in a ceaseless quest for the little food required to keep them alive until spring. Other wild things were about again. I heard the cheery voice of a hungry little chickadee as he hunted up and down a tree, searching for a hole in its coating of ice and snow but constantly chirping his pleasant notes in the face of dire adversity. A little farther on I stood until my body began to chill while I watched a sapsucker questing for the food he seemed unable to find, all the time talking softly to himself as if making a mighty effort to put a good face upon his misfortune. A red squirrel, more fortunate than some because of his hidden store, chattered as cheerily beneath the cold blue sky as if the air had been filled with the balm of spring. Gorgeous bluejays hopped among the icy trees, valiantly calling to

one another. At the edge of the plain I found a little flock of red-breasted cross-bills searching for food where Nature's cupboards were frozen and bare. Along the river, a spring-fed trout stream which never freezes, I counted a score of wild ducks. A fox passed along the edge of a clearing like a gorgeous red muff.

I began to marvel at the significance of it all. Here was life as in the days of man's primordial struggle! Here only the fittest could survive! To-day I saw creatures fighting off death from hunger, while cold and comfortless to the last degree, who yet made no complaint. Stout-hearted, they did not whine of their obvious misery to the rest of the world. That their small bodies did not crumple and die can be due only to their possession of souls buoyed up with faith and courage to believe that sunlit skies and balmy breezes have not gone forever, though for the moment the breath of the Grim Reaper may be all about.

In comparison with what I saw while on my

snowshoes to-day, I have suffered no hardships at all. Side by side with the valiant struggles which God's other creatures are making during these terrible weeks, my own efforts in what I think will readily be conceded an up-hill fight of long duration have been insignificant. I was simply fortunate in not having too easy a time in reaching the success which is mine as a writer of romances and tales of adventure. Events in our lives which we regard as great tribulations often prove in reality happenings of priceless value.

Many letters come to me from young writers asking a great variety of questions. How shall I begin? What shall I write about? How shall I build a plot? What is a plot? How much of an education must I have in order to write successfully? Ought I to go to college? Where can I find material and plots for stories? How long will I have to write before I can sell my stories? Where can I sell them? Must I know the editor? How did you get your "pull"? Will they steal my ideas if I let the editors read them? Will you

sell my work for me if I pay you a commission?

In addition to these questions there is one request which is more frequent than any other: Please tell me how you go about doing your own work. I shall try to answer it in some detail, with the hope that it will aid those who are now setting out on the hard road I have traveled.

I shall do my best to be absolutely honest, for my methods are simple and all can readily follow them. "Inspiration" is a pretty but misleading word which ought to be consigned to the limbo of forgotten things along with "genius." Hard and steady work for years, with a fixed purpose, is most important.

I dare say there are authors who waken in the middle of the night, seize their pens, and dash off world's masterpieces, with the power of Heaven guiding their hands. I do not happen to know any such persons, however, though I am acquainted with some who love to pose as such supermen. Most authors are but ordinary men and women who have trained themselves to earn a livelihood

with a pen in much the same manner as a surgeon learns to use his knife or a farmer his hoe.

At the outset, I want to emphasize the importance of a healthy body. One must keep fit physically. I rise from my bed at six o'clock regularly when at home, except in spring and summer when I often rise an hour earlier. Then, after drinking two glasses of pure, cold water, I snap through fifteen or twenty minutes of calisthenics, which I interrupt only long enough to permit the drinking of two more glasses of water. Half of these exercises are on the floor and half are done while standing up. These exercises, with other right methods of living, will make me live until I am a hundred years of age. Their importance cannot be too much emphasized.

After a bath, which includes the use of cold water, I have a breakfast which consists of half a bowl of bran with creamy milk. Dinner is at noon. There are many excellent reasons why a heavy meal should not be eaten at night. My dinner is largely composed of vegetables, though

not infrequently we have fish or fowl. Meat once a week is quite enough for a man who wants a long life. Even those who do a great deal of physical labor can find the proteins needed by their bodies in nuts, milk, cheese, and eggs. Of course, when on the wilderness trails my diet is very much different—not because it ought to be, however, but because I must eat what can be had. Then my body is hardened and I can handle what, perforce, I must eat.

After breakfast I walk vigorously for ten minutes, and as I have eaten lightly I do not thus disturb my digestive system. I walk rapidly, for slow walking is no exercise at all, and am at my studio by half-past seven, vibrantly alive and eager to get to work for the sheer pleasure of it. My brain is clear and my body healthy because I have started the day right by taking the opportunity which Nature intended all men should have.

The first thing is a fifteen-minute conference with my secretary. Then I disconnect the telephone, lock the door to my private room, and

bury myself in my writing until eleven-thirty. There are mornings when this work comes easily, almost spontaneously, but there are times when I seem to drag forth my thoughts word by word. Spontaneity, however, is no criterion of really good work. I find that when I concentrate and toil arduously the result is more likely to be satisfactory. Some write the first copy hurriedly and later correct it so much that one can truthfully say they rewrite it. I have held to the other extreme, believing that once a story is finished it can never be adequately rectified if written hastily in the beginning.

I build every line and page of my manuscript to the best of my ability, with the result that I am a very slow worker as compared with many. I average only about five hundred words a day. Often have I spent an entire forenoon on one paragraph of a dozen lines. I stay with a difficult passage until it is done satisfactorily. I never put off until to-morrow what I find hard to-day, for to-morrow rarely brings the needed skill.

Immediately after dinner I return to the studio, where I remain until four-thirty. That time is given over to dictating letters, planning the next day's work, reading, editing, gathering facts for future work, which I am careful to write out and file where they can be easily found again, and doing the odds and ends which always come up in the life of a busy man.

In the morning hours no one can get to see me except on the most urgent business that simply cannot be postponed. But in the afternoon all are welcome, even those who come out of curiosity alone. From whatever place they come and with whatever motive, all are my friends, whether I have ever seen them before or am likely to see them again.

Unless there are most extraordinary circumstances, I am away at half-past four for a brisk walk, a swim, golf, or a horseback ride, or whatever exercise is appropriate to the season. Then I am ready for a substantial supper, less heavy

than the noon meal, however, and without meat or a rich dessert.

I believe greatly in healthful physical play and in those kinds of mental play which are accompanied by the life-giving sunshine of fun, fellowship, and laughter. When such play becomes a nerve strain, instead of a relaxation, it ceases to be of value and may result in real harm. But the genuine elixir of life is physical play. It keeps the body strong and the mind alert. Even on my wilderness trips I carry balls and horse shoes. On many occasions, after a hard day's journey, my camp has been made joyous with physical sport.

Authors should write only about those people, things, and places which they know. This should be self-evident; yet nearly every one of them has an almost fatalistic passion to do otherwise. If you live in a picturesque country village, don't write about the city. On the other hand, if your life is in the city, don't try to write of the characters and settings you know little or nothing about. There is no sufficient reason why a Michi-

gan author should write of Arizona. Nor is there any excuse for a young woman who lives in a lovely cove by the sea, with a world of rich material about her, to write of what is happening at Newport or Palm Beach. Stick to truth when you write fiction—truth as to details, habits, and settings—even though the story be wholly imaginary. No other books have a chance to live.

Only those who are quite prepared to labor long and hard for little pay, and without any assurance of fame, should undertake to write for a living. A few earn large sums—but only a few. The great majority eke out a bare existence, living in anticipation of the great good fortune that is just around the corner.

My record as a writer of books during the first ten years after the publication of *The Courage of Captain Plum* was nothing of which one could be particularly proud, if one may judge it by the manner in which the public accepted my creations. Only a few knew when my books were born. About two thousand bought copies of my

first novel during its early months, but only eighty rushed to secure their copies during the last half of its first year of life. I get considerable satisfaction, however, out of the fact that a few years later this novel became immensely popular. Each year still, nearly twenty years after it was written, a few hundred copies are sold, and it has appeared in many languages.

The Wolf Hunters was a story for boys about the Canadian snow fields; one told so well, some critics said, as to commend itself to adult readers who enjoy a spirited tale. Wabigoon, the principal character, son of the Scotch factor at a post deep in the wilderness about Lake Nipigon and an Indian woman, was acknowledged to be well drawn and lifelike. His adventures were always of absorbing interest, frequently thrilling, and never unwholesome. In it I put a hint of a sequel by failing to show how Woonga was punished and quite neglecting to state whether Rod married Minnetki or found the lost gold mine. Nevertheless only a few more than fifteen hundred

copies were sold, and when *The Golden Hunters,* its sequel, was published in 1909 it proved to have no more appeal to the public than the previous volumes. Both these books have now been published in most of the countries of Europe and both have been widely distributed into the far corners of the British Empire, despite the cold reception they received at the outset.

Only about nine hundred persons felt the urge to own my large and beautiful volume, *The Great Lakes,* sufficiently to obey the impulse. It was published by G. P. Putnam's Sons and was offered at the then high price of three dollars and a half a volume.

My confidence in the book-publishing business became unsettled, and I lost much of the high regard which I had held for the good taste and sound judgment of the inhabitants of North America. Nevertheless, I continued to prepare novels wherever I happened to be—on Northern trails, in wilderness cabins, or at home in Owosso.

In 1910, after ten years as a prairie and wil-

derness free-lance for the Canadian government, I was without a regular salaried position again. In the meantime I had written *The Danger Trail* for the Bobbs-Merrill Company, and had had it published first as a serial in *Munsey's Magazine* under the title, *A Fight for Life.* The critics were unable to agree among themselves whether it was a masterpiece or a "dud," and as a result some ten thousand persons bought copies—in order to form opinions for themselves, I suppose.

One critic said: "James Oliver Curwood, who wrote *The Courage of Captain Plum,* is the author of a new tale called *The Danger Trail,* a Bobbs-Merrill publication." Nothing else! This, from a man accustomed to review current books, whether good or bad, at some length, was almost as harsh a criticism as that of the New York *Herald,* which said: "*The Danger Trail* is worthy of consideration only because it reveals the absurdly melodramatic depths which best-sellerism may reach." Another said: "This ex-

hausted reviewer will not pretend to say how many times the hero narrowly escaped the most devilishly ingenious tortures, or how the author must have racked his brain for fresh perils and miraculous escapes. Whoever wishes 'adventure' in large chunks will find it here."

Others, however, called it "a capital story of outdoor adventure in the Saskatchewan country," "a mystery tale of the ice-covered rivers and lakes and the mighty spruce forests told with a vigor and imagination often missing from admittedly good novels," and "a vivid, sharp, dynamic drama which rapidly unfolds under the masterful treatment of Mr. Curwood, the easy swing at which the romance develops resembling the pace of one to whom walking is a delight." Many others regarded it as a tale that was crisp and clean. All conceded, whether or not they thought well of the story, that the immensity of the Far North was admirably portrayed and that the forest isolation, the untrodden fields of snow, the silent places where no trail has yet been

blazed, the glory of the Northern Lights, and the quiet, loneliness, and peace of the tremendous wilderness were well depicted. This was my first taste of national fame and it would be folly now to insist that it was unpleasant.

It was about this time that I thought I saw an easier way to acquire my share of this world's goods than by means of my writing. In a single day I won an even hundred dollars by a trifling purchase of copper stock on margin. The thrill of this achievement caused me to buy other securities in like manner on a market going up so fast that I proudly assured my wife I had become a rich man, but I never was able fully to explain to her why I had brought none of it home. Soon, however, something called "the bottom" fell out of the market and my fortune was swept away.

I was too astonished to realize what had occurred, but I still had friends. From them I borrowed a hundred dollars. Then I wired the Grand Trunk for free transportation, and by the time it arrived my loyal wife and I were again ready

for the wilderness. We buried ourselves completely, fifty miles from the nearest trading post. Again I took up my pen—the only means by which I knew how to earn a living—and wrote *The Honor of the Big Snows*.

In this tale I sought to portray the spirit of chivalry and honor which I had found among the dwellers in the frozen North, and did my best to weave into it the mystery, tender romance, and fine friendship ever present in the hearts of those who call the rugged, picturesque, and unrelenting wilderness "home." I painted a human drama of great simplicity and vital significance, and endeavored to show Jan as worthy of admiration as Jean Valjean. His devotion to little Melisse was as dramatic as Jean's love for Cosette. Nearly all the critics conceded the story well told. Yet its popular appeal, shown in the royalty reports from the publishers, was not great. More copies have been sold in the reprint editions than in the days when it was first offered.

My contract with the Bobbs-Merrill Company

having been performed, Harper & Brothers brought out *Flower of the North* and *Isobel,* but the sales were smaller than those of my previous books, though both are still fairly well represented in the royalty reports I am now receiving —more than ten years after the first publications.

I grew desperate and went back to the Bobbs-Merrill Company with *Kazan,* the story of a wolf dog, which at first enjoyed a little popular favor, but later was sold in great quantities, particularly in England and in the cheaper American editions. I strove to make it a powerful and realistic tale of wild life in the Far North and portrayed the battle-scarred Kazan as a faithful ally, fighting to the last. I had been a close observer of the habits of wild animals in the woods and on the Great Barrens, and sought to win a place for my book like that held by Jack London's *White Fang* and his *Call of the Wild.* The critics rather generally denied me this, but conceded that my *Kazan* was a narrative of such interest as to prompt its complete perusal at one sitting.

By the time *Kazan* was written I had made five trips into the wilderness about Hudson Bay. Thrice had I gone into the arctic and spent a winter with the Esquimaux. I had crossed the Great Barrens four times and explored the unknown regions of British Columbia and the Yukon country. I had lived many months with the Indians, summer and winter, and had enjoyed many opportunities to make myself familiar with the habits and traits of wild animals. Particularly had I observed the huskies—fierce in battle, splendid in their brute strength, and as loyal to their masters as they are implacable in their hate for their enemies. Very few of the incidents in the book are purely fiction. Nearly all are based substantially on actual happenings which I have observed.

Although I had written nine volumes which had received but little popular favor when they were first published, I was still hopeful. Not long after *Kazan* was issued I became a member of the family of Doubleday, Page & Co., an association

which was most pleasant and inspiring. It continued until 1919.

The first book they published was *God's Country and the Woman,* which I had written in a cabin two hundred miles within the Hudson Bay country in the winter of 1914-15, where for seven months my wife and I saw no human being other than an Indian trapper named Jackpine. Into this story I wove a most intriguing mystery, a willingness on the part of the heroine to jeopardize her own happiness for that of her father—seldom found in real life—a love so deep and confident in the breast of the hero that it pierced the curtain of apparent unworthiness with which the heroine had felt it necessary to cloak her own actions, and a course of villainy that was eventually most terribly punished. Its sales were larger than those of any previous book of mine.

Then came *The Hunted Woman,* later published in England as *The Valley of Gold,* a novel of a type even then rather out of style, but nevertheless, so the critics said, the sort of book one

may read with relish before the open fireplace on a stormy winter night.

This was followed in the year 1917 by *The Grizzly King,* a story said by the critics to be no less delightful for having an excellent moral, and another animal story, *Baree, Son of Kazan.* Sales slowly but steadily increased.

During these years I came fully to understand that peace, health, and faith may be found in the whispering voices and even in the silence of God-loving things, and this discovery is particularly reflected in my next book, *The Courage of Marge O'Doone.* My eyes had been opened and my perceptions quickened by early blood-letting. Slaying for the sake of having one more trophy or for the thrill that comes at the moment the victim gives up the fight no longer was attractive. My adventuring in the heart of the world's most inaccessible wild places came to bear the fruit which God had ordained it should. The plot of *The Courage of Marge O'Doone* is rather improbable, it is true, but it was written more by inspiration than any

other book of mine. With less planning in advance and fewer notes than is usual in the preparation of my stories, the narrative developed vigorously—almost without my conscious control—and the critics said it was a splendid tale and most entertaining.

Then I wrote *The Golden Snare,* a tale of the people I had gotten to know on my trips into the Arctic regions, and in the next year, 1919, *Nomads of the North* was published, the last of my books to appear from the presses of Doubleday, Page & Co., for in that year an excellent opportunity for a much wider distribution of my books was offered. I parted from my friends at Garden City with much regret, and cherish the memories of the years we worked together.

My first book after I left the Doubleday organization in 1919 was *The River's End.* As a serial, it captured popular fancy instantly. It is called a clear, virile, and dramatic tale, full of romantic and adventurous incidents. Along with them are colorful delineations of the hardships

common to the silent expanses of the frozen North. It was the first of my books of which more than one hundred thousand copies were sold in the initial edition.

Shortly after the publication of *The River's End* I wrote *The Valley of Silent Men,* a tale hinged on the adventures of the wild crews which take flotillas of scows loaded with merchandise down the Saskatchewan, the Athabasca, and the Mackenzie rivers into the frozen Northland. The uproarious gallantry of these wild river brigades, their hardships, their courage, and their gallant defiance of the dangers incident to their occupation is portrayed in this tale. There are also woven into it characterizations of types of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, and it contains a love story of most absorbing interest. Eventually everything comes out happily under the serene gaze of the Watcher in the hidden Valley of Silent Men, which gives the yarn its title. Before writing this tale I made many trips with the rough rivermen, and the story is a true

portrayal of types which actually exist in God's Country. This story had an even larger sale than the preceding one, and I was then able to say truthfully that I was the best-paid novelist in America.

It would be strange, indeed, were a story teller to arise who could write a masterpiece on demand. A great many books of mine were listed among the "best sellers," but my *Flaming Forest,* which followed *The Valley of Silent Men,* got into that class by reason of the fame which I had acquired rather than because of the merit of the book. It belongs, nevertheless, among the colorful tales of the Northwest which stir one's blood, as tales of wilderness adventures ever do, and though the story is thin and not very convincing, it has a rather well-drawn and exciting climax in the fire which gives the book its name.

For several years, about the time of the World War, I had been writing a series of stories in which Jolly Roger McKay was the principal char-

acter, and the ideas there developed resulted in my novel of the year 1922, *The Country Beyond.* It recounts the adventures of a lovable outlaw in the Canadian wilderness, a sort of Robin Hood, his love for an extraordinary girl, and the story of a mongrel dog which cannot help but thrill and entertain all who love animals. The tenacity with which the Royal Northwest Mounted Police cling to a trail and come back with the man they went for, or not at all, and the better qualities of the Indians who live in the Canadian forests are portrayed.

Just before *The Country Beyond* was published in book form, but after the Jolly Roger stories had appeared, I wrote a small volume, published in 1921, called *God's County—The Trail to Happiness.* It is a collection of four essays, none of which was written to please those who consider the organized Church to be an institution of importance in our national life. "My Secret of Happiness," "I Become a Killer," "My Brotherhood," and "The Road to Faith," of

which this volume is composed, contain a summary of the religion of a Nature-loving man.

The Great Master has opened to me the book wherein is written the secret of a joyful life—a secret which He never intended to be hidden, but which has been concealed for untold years because men will not read what is spread upon the pages of the wonderful book, or, having read, will not believe. Their eyes are holden so that they do not see the glory of living and their ears do not hear the myriad sounds which blend in life's immortal melody.

The faith which possesses me so fully now assures me that all life, human and animal, and even that of trees and flowers, is a precious and indestructible part of the Great Arbiter's scheme of spiritual as well as physical existence.

I have found the great understanding heart of Nature, and the thrill of its discovery has set the blood coursing faster in my veins. I have learned to understand the voice of Nature, and in doing so have obtained health, developed faith,

and partaken of the glory of living. In that voice there is inspiration, and it whispers to me the hope that all shall soon understand.

In *Kazan* and also in *Baree, Son of Kazan* I sought to immortalize dogs. I have loved them since the days I owned the mongrel hound called Jack on the stony farm in Ohio, and have always had a dog on which to lavish my affection. In my stories of "Swift Lightning," which have appeared in serial form and later in a set of animal stories, though never as a separate book, the ambition I felt in 1914 that *Kazan* should be regarded as of equal merit with *White Fang* and *The Call of the Wild* came very near to being realized.

Only a short time after the publication of *The Country Beyond,* a tale of the wilderness which lies just north of Lake Superior, I made a trip into the country about Lac St. Jean in the province of Quebec. All of my previous travels in Canada had been in the wildernesses far to the west and north. I spent a considerable part of my time

in and about the quaint French-Canadian village of Peribonka, the inhabitants of which still lead the life of picturesque simplicity that their ancestors for many generations have loved. The quiet little village situated on the very edge of an almost untouched wilderness strangely intrigued me, and caused me to write some short stories reflecting the kindness and gentle simplicity of the inhabitants as well as the roaring, passionate life on the Mistassini, fifteen miles away. But the theme got clear away from me, and the result was a novel called *The Crippled Lady of Peribonka.*

The critics say my work has become too standardized, and that *A Gentleman of Courage* and *The Ancient Highway* contain nothing of consequence which I have not previously written. So I have undertaken to write some historical novels.

I am determined that in no particular shall these books be subject to adverse criticism. With the most painstaking care I have sought all avail-

able information concerning the characters, how they lived, what they wore, their manner of speaking, the homes they had, their social activities, and the many other things which go to make up the picture of human life. I have gone to original sources rather than the summaries or conclusions of other authors. *The Black Hunter* has just been published, and *The Plains of Abraham* will soon be available. There has not yet been sufficient time for the formation of mature judgment concerning their value. Both are readable tales, and the worst criticism I have heard is that they deal with events concerning which a great many people have little interest.

Among the greatest boons which have been given me is the opportunity to work. Only the man or woman who has another task to perform when the one at hand is finished can be happy. The greatest and most successful men work steadily until they die. They do not retire when they have achieved a measure of fame and fortune, but, in continuing at a labor which they

love, live longer than those who have shirked. They become great and successful because they love their work rather than because they seek to attain an end.

This is particularly true of authors. The writer who starts out with the thought of making money is foredoomed to failure. The work demands courage, energy, and determination, though many think the lot of an author who is known to have "arrived" is an easy and pleasant one. But the toil brings happiness, and so greatly a part of one's heart and soul does it become that more than one author has continued on his last book when he knew that death was but a few weeks away.

I do not, however, want to be understood as advocating that work, and yet more work, is the highest good of human existence. God intended play to be among his priceless gifts to mankind and created in men and women the power to laugh and sing while at work. Without such power the paths of life would be dark and gloomy, indeed.

And because the ways of some men and women are laid where there can be but little of laughter and few songs, necessity—long known as the mother of invention—prompted the creation of books, to the end that men and women may thrill at the noble deeds of make-believe people, cry in sympathy over their sorrows, laugh at that which makes them laugh, and honor and love the heroes and heroines who there live their lives as we would live ours if we could.

My banker has convinced me that I have been successful, though I fully understand that success, true success, can never be measured in terms of money alone. The sales of my novels have been exceptionally large, but people buy books by the hundreds of thousands only when they find therein that which appeals to their own fundamental beliefs and aspirations. I conceive their popularity to be due to the fact that they are undeniably clean.

Men and women are fundamentally honorable and upright in their relations with each other,

and they like to read about others who are similarly motivated. Down through the ages only decency and cleanliness have endured in written pages. Unexpurgated volumes of old are kept under careful guard in our libraries because of the glamour of their antiquity. Modern tales in which emphasis is placed on manifestations of carnal passion are rarely found there, though they may pose as studies of current conditions and the emotions aroused thereby. Such books claim attention for the moment, like the phosphorescent glow sometimes observed over a grave, but they vanish as quickly and leave only a shivering memory of their horror behind. Vengeance is sure for violations of decency. Authors who so offend die as ingloriously and unsung as the volumes which record the filth in their brains.

The books that have lived and have preserved to us the fame of their authors are clean books. Had Charles Dickens filled his pages with the sex scandals and passions of his day none but

students intent on research would know the name; but he did not, and his works live, to encourage and inspire forever.

The world is good at heart and constantly growing better. It builds few monuments to evil, and with each generation is determinedly pulling down those which have survived beyond the years when they were inadvisedly raised. In the churches, in the schools, in business life, and on the streets human vision is broadening and men and women are reaching out their hands to their fellows, forming a brotherhood based on a larger and cleaner understanding of life and a keener appreciation of the immortal melody of it. I shall yet live to see the day when discords will be so rare as to attract the closest attention to their causes.

Critics have written many columns about me and my books, much that was favorable, but some that was otherwise. Now and then their comments have stung like a whiplash, but more often the unfavorable comment has been such as to

arouse only pity for the scribe who indited it. One man praised without stint my ability to describe Nature and my skill in marshaling facts, at the same time declaring, "Curwood's work rises almost to the height of real literature, but not quite, because he insists upon making his men and women flawless in their virtue and unbelievably strong of character—in short, 'too good to be true!' "

I thank God that in only one of my books, and that an early one, have I approached what would have evidently pleased that critic. Why should I not write of wholesome men and women, of clean actions, of just and upright conduct? Why should I not recount tales of people who cherished ideals? Why should I refrain from telling of the things to which we all aspire?

I see no good reason why I should take a woman of the streets and glorify her, though once, when I was a boy, one of them gave me a glimpse of as unselfish a devotion to the finer things of life as I have ever known in any woman.

There are too many good women whom I may glorify and clothe with ideals. Why should I make my women ugly in character or in appearance when we all love beauty? We always choose the most beautiful flowers of the entire garden for the bedchambers of our guests.

Why shouldn't I punish the bad people in my books and make a record that happiness came eventually to those who deserved it? Some critics may say, "People are not like that and things don't come out that way," but my experience has been to the contrary. Happiness does come to those who deserve it. Eventually their ears do catch the immortal melody of life, as Melisse heard the music of her people; and they often learn to appreciate it long before they pass on to another existence.

The world is filled with strong and good men, and with women who are beautiful and virtuous, people who are the equals or superiors of those who live in the pages of my books. It is about such folks that I choose to write.

I want to know that when a book of mine has been read it will be put down with a feeling of pleasure and satisfaction. I want to know that I have aroused thoughts of beautiful things, not ugly ones. I consider it worth any man's best effort to set young women to dreaming of a beautiful home, splendid children, and a useful life, or to send young men into the glory of the woods to learn of the things which make men really men, inspire courage and fortitude, and develop character. Nothing else is more worth while than to be the means of causing others to realize that life is an immortal melody and its discords entirely of our own making.

Cleanliness is what has caused my books to sell. They may be ordinary in craftsmanship and fail to reveal that I possess the spark which some call genius, but during the past decade hundreds of thousands of copies have been sold, and that can only be because men and women find in their pages people who do the things they themselves would like to accomplish, people who are moti-

vated by the same conceptions of honorable conduct which my readers have, people who have learned that life is real and full of opportunities to show that in very truth God created man in His own image.

THE END

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